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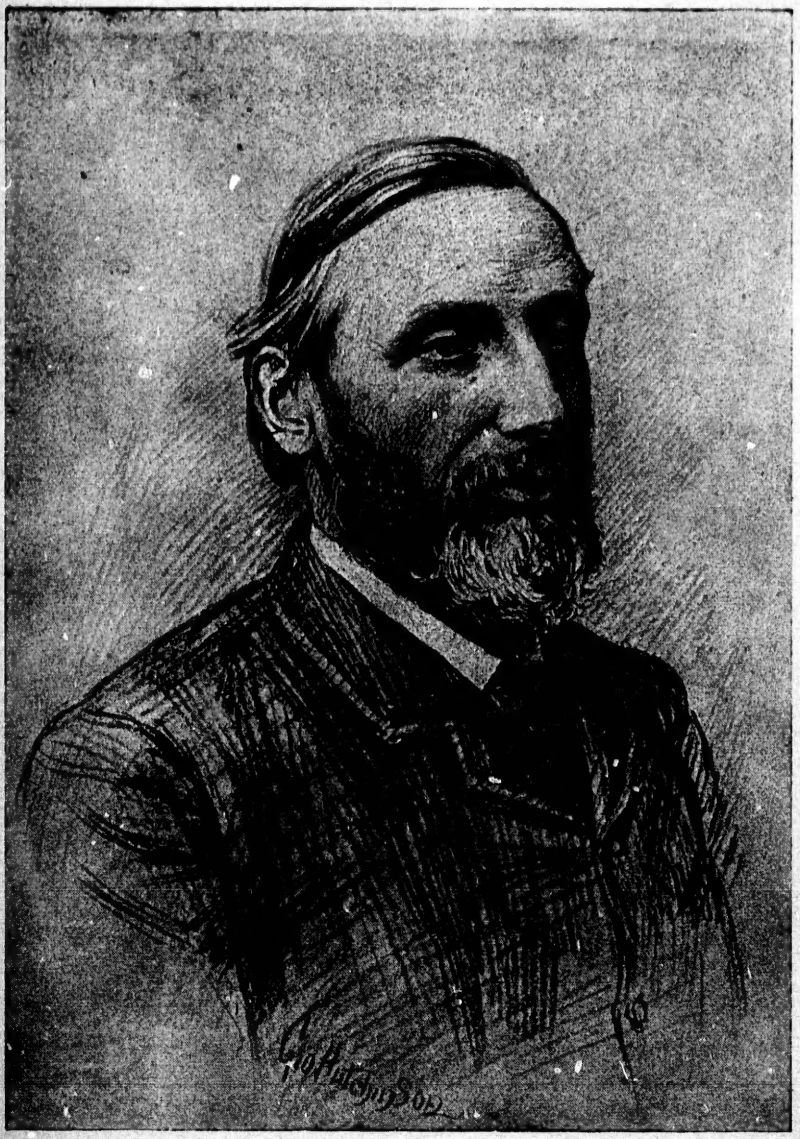
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AT MARKET VALUE



MR. GRANT ALLEN.

AT MARKET VALUE

A Novel

BY

GRANT ALLEN

AUTHOR OF

'THIS MORTAL COIL,' 'BLOOD ROYAL,' 'THE SCALLYWAG,' ETC.

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F. TENNYSON NEELY,

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PREFACE.

The story of My First Book is a good deal mixed, and, like many other stories, cannot be fully understood without some previous allusion to what historians call "the causes which led to it." For my first book was not my first novel, and it is the latter, I take it, not the former, that an expectant world, is anxious to hear about. I first blossomed into print with *Physiological Æsthetics* in 1877—the title alone will be enough for most people—and it was not till seven years later that I wrote and published my earliest long work of fiction, which I called *Philistia*. I wasn't born a novelist, I was only made one. Philosophy and science were the first loves of my youth. I dropped into romance as many men drop into drink, or opium-eating, or other bad practices, not of native perversity, but by pure force of circumstances. And this is how fate (or an enterprising publisher) turned me from an innocent and impecunious naturalist into a devotee of the muse of shilling shockers.

When I left Oxford in 1870, with a decent degree and nothing much else in particular to brag about, I took perforce to that refuge of the destitute, the trade of schoolmaster. To teach Latin and Greek verse at Brighton College, Cheltenham College, Reading Grammar School, successively, was the extremely uncongenial task imposed upon me by the chances of the universe. But in 1873, Providence, disguised as the Colonial Office, sent me out in

charge of a new Government College at Spanish Town, Jamaica. I had always been psychological, and in the space and leisure of the lazy Tropics, I began to excogitate by slow degrees various expansive works on the science of mind, the greater number of which still remain unwritten. Returning to England in '76 I found myself out of work, and so committed to paper some of my views on the origin of the higher pleasure we derive from natural or artistic products; and I called my book *Physiological Æsthetics*. It was not my very first attempt at literature; already I had produced about a hundred or more magazine articles on various philosophical and scientific subjects, every one of which I sent to the editors of leading reviews, and every one of which was punctually "Declined with thanks," or committed without even that polite formality to the editorial waste-paper basket. Nothing daunted by failure, however, I wrote on and on, and made up my mind, in my interval of forced idleness, to print a book of my own at all hazards.

I wrote *Physiological Æsthetics* in lodgings at Oxford. When it was finished and carefully revised, I offered it to Messrs. Henry S. King & Co., who were then leading publishers of philosophical literature. Mr. Kegan Paul, their reader, reported doubtfully of the work. It was not likely to pay, he said, but it contained good matter, and the firm would print it for me on the usual commission. I was by no means rich—for fear of exaggeration I am stating the case mildly—but I believed somehow in *Physiological Æsthetics*. I was young then, and I hope the court of public opinion will extend to me, on that ground, the indulgence usually shown

to juvenile offenders. But I happened to possess a little money just at that moment, granted me as compensation for the abolition of my office in Jamaica. Messrs. King reported that the cost of production (that mysterious entity so obnoxious to the soul of Mr. Walter Besant) would amount to about a hundred guineas. A hundred guineas was a lot of money then; but, being young, I risked it. It was better than if I had taken it to Monte Carlo, anyway. So I wrote to Mr. Paul with heedless haste to publish away right off, and he published away right off accordingly. When the bill came in, it was, if I recollect aright, somewhere about £120. I paid it without a murmur; I got my money's worth. The book appeared in a stately green cover, with my name in front, and looked very philosophical, and learned, and psychological.

Poor *Physiological Æsthetics* had a very hard fate. When I come to look back upon the circumstances calmly and dispassionately now, I'm not entirely surprised at its unhappy end. It was a good book in its way, to be sure, though it's me that says it, as oughtn't to say it, and it pleased the few who cared to read it; but it wasn't the sort of literature the public wanted. The public, you know, doesn't hanker after philosophy. Darwin, and Herbert Spencer, and the Editor of *Mind*, and people of that sort, tried my work and liked it; in point of fact, my poor little venture gained me at once, an unknown man, the friendship of not a few whose friendship was worth having. But financially, *Physiological Æsthetics* was a dead failure; it wasn't the sort of work to sell briskly at the bookstalls. The reviews, indeed, were, almost without exception,

favorable; the volume went off well for a treatise of its kind—that is to say, we got rid of nearly 300 copies; but even so, it left a deficit of some forty or fifty pounds to the bad against me. Finally, the remaining stock fell a victim to the flames in Mr. Kegan Paul's historical fire, when many another stout volume perished; and that was the end of my *magnum opus*. Peace to its ashes! Mr. Paul gave me £15 as compensation for loss sustained, and I believe I came out some £30 a loser by this, my first serious literary venture. In all these matters, however, I speak from memory alone, and it is possible I may be slightly wrong in my figures.

I won't detail in full the history of my various intermediate books, most of which were published first as newspaper articles, and afterwards collected and put forth on a small royalty. Time is short, and art is long, so I'll get on at once to my first novel. I drifted into fiction by the sheerest accident. My friend, Mr. Chatto, most generous of men, was one of my earliest and staunchest literary supporters. From the outset of my journalistic days, he printed my articles in *Belgravia* and the *Gentleman's Magazine* with touching fidelity; and I take this opportunity of saying in public that to his kindness and sympathy I owe as much as to anyone in England. Mr. Walter Besant will have it there is no such thing as "generosity" in publishers. I beg leave to differ from him. I know the commercial value of literary work as well as any man, and I venture to say that both from Mr. Chatto and from Mr. Arrowsmith, of Bristol, I have met, time and again, with what I cannot help describing as most generous treatment. One day it happened

that I wanted to write a scientific article on the impossibility of knowing one had seen a ghost, even if one saw one. For convenience sake, and to make the moral clearer, I threw the argument into narrative form, but without the slightest intention of writing a story. It was published in *Belgravia* under the title of "Our Scientific Observations on a Ghost," and was reprinted later in my little volume of *Strange Stories*. A little while after, to my immense surprise, Mr. Chatto wrote to ask me whether I could supply him with another story, like the last I had written, for the *Belgravia Annual*. I was rather taken aback at this singular request, as I hadn't the slightest idea I could do anything at all in the way of fiction. Still, like a good journalist, I never refuse an order of any sort; so I sat down at once and wrote a tale about a mummy on the ghastliest and most approved Christmas number pattern. Strange to say, Mr. Chatto again printed it, and what was still more remarkable, asked for more of the same description. From that time forth, I went on producing short stories for *Belgravia*, but I hardly took them seriously, being immersed at the time in biological study. I looked upon my own pretensions in the way of fiction as an amiable fad of my kind friend Chatto; and not to prejudice any little scientific reputation I might happen to have earned, I published them all under the carefully-veiled pseudonym of "J. Arbuthnot Wilson."

I would probably never have gone any further on my downward path had it not been for the accidental intervention of another believer in my powers as a story-writer. I had sent to *Belgravia* a little tale about a Chinaman, entitled "Mr. Chung,"

and written perhaps rather more seriously and carefully than my previous efforts. This happened to attract the attention of Mr. James Payn, who had then just succeeded to the editorship of the *Cornhill*. I had been a constant contributor to the *Cornhill* under Leslie Stephen's management, and by a singular coincidence I received almost at the same time two letters from Mr. Payn, one of them addressed to me in my own name, and regretting that he would probably be unable to insert my scientific papers in his magazine in future; the other, sent through Chatto and Windus to the imaginary J. Arbuthnot Wilson, and asking for a short story somewhat in the style of my "admirable Mr. Chung."

Encouraged by the discovery that so good a judge of fiction thought well of my humble efforts at story-writing, I sat down at once and produced two pieces for the *Cornhill*. One was "The Reverend John Creedy"—a tale of a black parson who reverted to savagery—which has perhaps attracted more attention than any other of my short stories. The other, which I myself immensely prefer, was "The Curate of Churnside." Both were so well noticed that I began to think seriously of fiction as an alternative subject. In the course of the next year I wrote several more sketches of the same sort, which were published either anonymously or still under the pseudonym, in the *Cornhill*, *Longman's*, *The Gentleman's*, and *Belgravia*. If I recollect aright, the first suggestion to collect and reprint them all in a single volume came from Mr. Chatto. They were published as *Strange Stories*, under my own name, and I thus, for the first time, acknowl-

edged my desertion of my earliest loves—science and philosophy—for the less profound but more lucrative pursuit of literature.

Strange Stories was well received and well reviewed. Its reception gave me confidence for future ventures. Acting upon James Payn's advice, I set to work seriously upon a three-volume novel. My first idea was to call it "Born Out of Due Time," as it narrated the struggles of a Socialist thinker a century in front of his generation; but at Mr. Chatto's suggestion, the title was afterwards changed to *Philistia*. I desired, if possible, to run it through the *Cornhill*, and Mr. Payn promised to take it into his most favourable consideration for that purpose. However, when the unfinished manuscript was submitted in due time to his editorial eye, he rightly objected that it was far to socialistic for the tastes of his public. He said it would rather repel than attract readers. I was disappointed at the time. I see now that, as an editor, he was perfectly right; I was giving the public what I felt and thought and believed myself, not what the public felt and thought and wanted. The education of an English novelist consists entirely in learning to subordinate all his own ideas and tastes and opinions to the wishes and beliefs of the inexorable British matron.

Mr. Chatto, however, was prepared to accept the undoubted risk of publishing *Philistia*. Only, to meet his views, the *dénoument* was altered. In the original version, the hero came to a bad end, as a hero in real life who is in advance of his age, and consistent and honest, must always do. But the British matron, it seems, likes her novels to "end well;" so I married him off instead, and made him

live happily ever afterward. Mr. Chatto gave me a lump sum down for serial rights and copyright, and ran *Philistia* through the pages of *The Gentleman's*. When it finally appeared in book form, it obtained on the whole more praise than blame, and, as it paid a great deal better than scientific journalism, it decided me that my *role* in life henceforth must be that of a novelist. And a novelist I now am, good, bad, or indifferent.

If anybody gathers, however, from this simple narrative, that my upward path from obscurity to a very modest modicum of popularity and success was a smooth and easy one, he is immensely mistaken. I had a ten years' hard struggle for bread, into the details of which I don't care to enter. It left me broken in health and spirit, with all the vitality and vivacity crushed out of me. I suppose the object of this series of papers is to warn off ingenuous and aspiring youth from the hardest worked and worst paid of the professions. If so, I would say earnestly to the ingenuous and aspiring—"Brain for brain, in no market can you sell your abilities to such poor advantage. Don't take to literature if you've capital enough in hand to buy a good broom, and energy enough to annex a vacant crossing."

London, August, 1894. GRANT ALLEN.

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AT MARKET VALUE

CHAPTER I.

AN ACCIDENTAL MEETING.

'Twas a dejected, dispirited, sheepish-looking throng that gathered, one black Wednesday, round the big back door in Burlington Gardens. For it was Taking-away Day at the Royal Academy.

For weeks before that annual holocaust, many anxious hearts have waited and watched in eager suspense for the final verdict of the Hanging Committee. To hang or not to hang—that is the question. But on Taking-away Day the terrible fiat at last arrives; the Committee regret (on a lithographed form) that want of space compels them to decline Mr. So-and-so's oil-painting, 'The Fall of Babylon,' or Miss Whatshername's water-colour, 'By Leafy Thames,' and politely inform them that they may remove them at their leisure, and at their own expense, from Burlington House by the back door aforesaid. Then follows a sad ceremony: the rejected flock together to recover their slighted goods, and keep one another company in their hour of humiliation. It is a community of grief, a fellowship in

misery. Each is only sustained from withering under the observant eyes of his neighbour by the inward consciousness that that neighbour himself, after all, is in the self-same box, and has been the recipient that day of an identical letter.

Nevertheless it was some consolation to Kathleen Hesslegrave in her disappointment to observe the varying moods and shifting humours of her fellow-sufferers among the rejected. She had a keen sense of the ridiculous, and it lightened her trouble somewhat to watch among the crowd the different funny ways in which other people bore or concealed their own disappointment for her edification. There were sundry young men, for example, with long hair down their backs and loose collars of truly Byronic expansiveness, whom Kathleen at once recognised as unacclaimed geniuses belonging to the very newest and extremest school of modern impressionism. They hailed from Newlyn. These lordly souls, budding Raphaels of the future, strolled into the big room with a careless air of absolute unconcern, as who should wonder they had ever deigned to submit their immortal works to the arbitrament of a mere everyday Hanging Committee; and they affected to feel very little surprise indeed at finding that a vulgar bourgeois world had disdained their efforts. They disdained the vulgar bourgeois world in return with contempt at compound interest visibly written on their æsthetic features. Others, older and shabbier, slunk in unobserved, and shouldered their canvases, mostly unobtrusive landscapes, with every appearance of antique familiarity. It was not the first time they had received that insult. Yet others again—and these were chiefly young girls—advanced blushing and giggling a little from sup-

pressed nervousness, to recover with shame their unvalued property. Here and there, too, a big burly-shouldered man elbowed his way through the crowd as though the place belonged to him, and hauled off his *magnum opus* (generally a huge field of historical canvas, 'King Edward at Calais,' or, 'The Death of Attila') with a defiant face which seemed to bode no good to the first Academician he might chance to run against on his way down Bond Street. A few, on the contrary, were anxious to explain, with unnecessary loudness of voice, that they hadn't sent in themselves at all this year; they had called for a picture by a friend—that was all, really. Kathleen stood aside and watched their varied moods with quiet amusement; it distracted her attention for the time from her own poor picture.

At last she found herself almost the only person remaining out of that jostling crowd, with a sailor-looking man, brown and bronzed, beside her.

'"In a Side Canal; Kathleen Hesslegrave." Yes, this is yours, mum,' the porter said gruffly. 'But you'll want a man to take it down to the cab for you.'

Kathleen glanced at her little arms; they were not very strong, to be sure, though plump and shapely. Then she looked at the porter. But the porter stood unmoved. With a struggling little effort Kathleen tried to lift it. 'In a Side Canal' was a tolerably big picture, and she failed to manage it. The sailor-looking body by her side raised his hat with a smile. His face was brown and weather-beaten, but he had beautiful teeth, very white and regular, and when he smiled he showed them. He looked like a gentleman,

too, though he was so roughly dressed, with a sailor's roughness. 'May I help you?' he asked, as he raised his hat. 'We two seem to be the last—I suppose because we were more modestly retiring than the rest of them. This is a good big picture.'

'Yes,' Kathleen answered regretfully. 'And it took me a good long time to paint it.'

The sailor-looking young man glanced at the subject carelessly.

'Oh, Venetian!' he cried. 'Why, how odd! We're neighbours. Mine's Venetian, too. The very next canal; I painted it quite close to San Giovanni e Paolo.'

'So did I,' Kathleen exclaimed, brightening up, a little surprised at the coincidence.

'When were you there?'

'Last autumn.'

'Then I wonder we never met,' the young man put in with another sunshiny smile. 'I was working on that canal every day of my life from November to January.'

He was carrying her picture as he spoke towards the door for a cab.

'Oh, how funny!' Kathleen exclaimed, looking closer at his features. 'It's queer we never happened to knock up against one another. And we knew so many people in Venice, too. Used you ever to go to the Martindales' palazzo?'

The young man smiled once more, this time a restrained smile of deprecatory modesty. If his teeth were good, he certainly lost no opportunity of showing them.

'No; I didn't know the Martindales,' he answered very hastily, as if anxious to disclaim the social

honour thus thrust upon him, for the Martindales lead Anglo-Venetian society.

'Then, perhaps, the Chericis?' Kathleen interposed once more, with that innate human desire we all of us feel to find some common point with every stranger we run against.

'No,' her new friend replied, looking graver now. 'Nor Countess Cherici either. In point of fact, I may say—except one or two other painter-fellows, if I can call myself a painter—I know nobody in Venice. I was not in society.'

'Oh!' Kathleen answered, dropping her voice a little; for, though she was a sensible girl, in the circle she had been brought up in, not to be in society was considered almost criminal.

The young man noted the sudden drop in her voice, and a curious little line developed itself for a second near the corners of his mouth—an upward line, curving sideways obliquely. It was clear he was amused by her altered demeanour. But he made no reply. He only bore the picture gravely to the door of the Academy, and there tried to call the attention of some passing hansom. But it was clearly useless. They were all engaged already, and the crush at the door was still so great there could be no chance of hiring one for another ten minutes. So the young man laid down the big picture near the door, with its face propped up against the entrance wall, and saying quietly, 'I'll help you in with it by-and-by when I see any chance,' went back to the inner room to recover his own Venetian canvas.

He was gone a minute; and when he returned, Kathleen could see he almost ostentatiously set his own picture down at some distance from hers, as

though he was little anxious to continue the conversation. She was sorry for that. He had seemed so eager to help her with such genuine kindliness; and she was afraid he saw his last remark about not being in society had erected an instinctive class-barrier between them. So, after a moment's hesitation, she left her own work to take care of itself, and took a step or two forward toward her new acquaintance's ambitious canvas. 'You saw mine,' she said apologetically, by way of reopening conversation: 'May I see yours? One likes to sit in judgment on the Hanging Committee.'

The young man seemed pleased. He had a speaking face, and was handsome withal, with a seafaring handsomeness. 'Oh yes, if you like,' he answered; 'though I'm afraid you won't care for it.' And he turned the painted face of the picture towards her.

'But why on earth didn't they take it?' Kathleen cried spontaneously, almost as soon as she saw it. 'What lovely light on the surface of the water! And oh! the beautiful red sails of those Chioggia fishing-boats!'

'I'm glad you like it,' the stranger replied, with evident pleasure, blushing like a girl. 'I don't care for criticism as a rule, but I love sincerity; and the way you spoke showed me at once you were really sincere about it. That's a very rare quality—about the hardest thing to get in this world, I fancy.'

'Yes, I was quite sincere,' Kathleen answered with truth. 'It's a beautiful picture. The thing I can't understand is why on earth they should have rejected it.'

The young man shrugged his shoulders and made an impatient gesture. 'They have so many pictures

to judge in so short a time,' he answered with a tolerance which was evidently habitual to him. 'It doesn't do to expect too much from human nature. All men are fallible, with perhaps the trifling exception of the Pope. We make mistakes ourselves, sometimes; and in landscape especially they have such miles to choose from. Not,' he went on after a short pause, 'that I mean to say I consider my own fishing-boats good enough to demand success, or even to deserve it. I'm the merest beginner. I was thinking only of the general principle.'

'I'm afraid you're a dreadful cynic,' Kathleen put in with a little wave of her pretty gloved hand, just to keep up the conversation. She was still engaged in looking close into the details of his rejected handicraft. Though deficient in technique, it had marked imagination.

The stranger smiled a broader and more genial smile than ever. 'Oh no, not a cynic, I hope,' he answered with emphasis, in a way that left no doubt about his own sincerity. 'It isn't cynical, surely, to recognise the plain facts of human nature. We're all of us prone to judge a good deal by the most superficial circumstances. Suppose now, you and I were on the Hanging Committee ourselves: just at first, of course, we'd be frightfully anxious to give every work the fullest and fairest consideration. Responsibility would burden us. We would weigh each picture well, and reject it only after due deliberation. But human nature can't keep up such a strain as that for long together. We'd begin very fresh, but towards the end of the day we'd be dazed and tired. We'd say: "Whose is that? Ah! by So-and-so's son; a brother R.A. I know his father. Well, it's not badly painted;

we'll let it in, I think. What do *you* say, Jiggamaree?" And then with the next: "Who's this by, porter? Oh, a fellow called Smith! Not very distinctive, is it? H'm; we've rejected every bit as good already; space is getting full. Well, put it away for the present, Jones: we'll mark it doubtful." That's human nature, after all; and what we each of us feel we would do ourselves, we can none of us fairly blame in others.'

'But I call that cynicism,' Kathleen persisted, looking up at him.

If the stranger was a cynic, he had certainly caught the complaint in its most genial form, for he answered at once with perfect good-humour: 'Oh no, I don't think so. It's mere acceptance of the facts of life. The cynic assumes a position of censure. He implies that human nature does this, that, or the other thing, which *he*, with his higher and purer moral sense, would never so much as dream of doing. Knowledge of the world is not necessarily cynicism. The cynical touch is added to it by want of geniality and of human tolerance. It is possible for us to know what men and women are like, and yet to owe them no grudge for it —to recognise that, after all, we are all of us *au fond* very nearly identical.'

He spoke like a gentleman and a man of culture. Kathleen was a little surprised, now she heard him talk, to find him so much more educated than she had at first fancied. For his rough exterior had rather prejudiced her against the sailor-looking stranger. But his voice was so pleasant, and his smile so frank, that she really quite admired him, in spite of his sentiments. She was just going to answer him, in defence of human nature, against his supposed

strictures, when a voice in the crowd close by distracted her attention. 'Why, Miss Hesslegrave, there you are!' it cried. 'I wondered if I should see you. Oh, yes, indeed, I also am among the killed and wounded. I've got no fewer than three of them. What, all my pretty ones! A perfect massacre of the innocents. But there, the Hanging Committee is as bad as its name. No respecter of persons. Ruthless, ruthless, ruthless! And Arnold Willoughby, too! Well, Willoughby, how are you? I really didn't know you two knew each other.'

'We don't,' Kathleen answered, taking the newcomer's hand. 'We've only just met here. But your friend's been so kind. He's carried my poor rejected picture down for me, and we're waiting for a cab. It *is* such a crush—and all of us trying to pretend we don't mind about it!'

'Who's cynical now?' the stranger put in, with a mischievous twinkle in his eye. 'I do mind very much; it's bread and butter to *me;* and I don't pretend to conceal it. But I'll leave you now. I see you've found a friend, and I can be of no further service to you.' He raised his hat with more grace than Kathleen could have expected from those rough sailor-like clothes: 'Good-bye,' he said; 'Mortimer, you'll see after the picture.'

The American, for he was one, nodded a polite assent.

'How lucky I am, Miss Hesslegrave,' he murmured, 'to have met you by accident! And talking to Willoughby, too! You can't think what a conquest that is.' He glanced with some amusement after the stranger's retreating figure. 'You know,' he said, lowering his voice, 'Willoughby's a professed miso-

gynist, or next door to one, anyhow; this is the very first time I've ever seen him speaking to a lady. As a rule, he runs away from them the moment he sees one. It was conjectured in Venice among the fellows who knew him that he had been what school-girls describe as "crossed in love," he avoided them so carefully. I suppose the truth is one of them must have jilted him.'

'He was very kind to *me*,' Kathleen interposed quietly. 'He saw me struggling with this great big canvas, and he came up to help me, and was so nice and polite about it.'

'Ah yes,' the American answered, a little lower than before, with a meaning glance. 'Kind to *you*, Miss Hesslegrave; that doesn't prove much; even a confirmed misogynist could hardly be less; we must allow for circumstances.'

Kathleen coloured a little, but didn't altogether dislike the compliment, for Mortimer was rich—very rich indeed—and the acknowledged catch of the artistic American colony in Paris. But she turned the subject hastily.

'Where did you meet him?' she asked, looking down at her pretty shoes. 'He's so rough-looking outside; yet he seems a gentleman.'

'Oh, he *is* a gentleman, undoubtedly,' Mortimer answered with true American candour; 'a born gentleman, though not quite the conventional one. He's as poor as a church mouse, and he's been a sailor, I fancy.'

'Who is he?' Kathleen asked with evident interest.

'Ah, who is he? That's the question,' Mortimer answered mysteriously. 'He's a dark horse, I imagine. I picked him up accidentally last autumn in Venice.

He used to lodge at a tiny Italian *trattoria*, down a side canal—not far from my palazzo—and live off *fritura*—you know the sort of stuff—fish, flesh, and fowl, three meals a penny.'

'How brave of him!' Kathleen said simply. 'He looks very nice. And all for art's sake, I suppose, Mr. Mortimer?'

The American laughed.

'All for poverty's sake, I imagine,' he answered with candour. 'So he told me himself. He didn't care so much about art, he said, as about earning a livelihood; and I really believe he starves in his den when he sells no pictures.'

'Why did he run away from us?' Kathleen asked, peering around into the crowd to see if she could discover him.

'Well, to tell you the truth,' Mortimer replied, 'I think it was mainly because he saw *me* come up; and also because of the faint intonation in your voice when you said, "We don't know one another." Willoughby's a misogynist, as I told you, and he's also sensitive, absurdly sensitive—he might almost be one of my fellow-countrymen. I don't doubt, when you said that, he took it as his dismissal. He understood you to mean, "Now I've done, sir, with *you*. Here's somebody else I know. *You* may go about your business." And being a person who always feels acutely when he's *de trop*, he went about his business at once, accordingly.'

'I'm sorry,' Kathleen put in; 'for I really rather liked him.'

'Oh, he's a thorough good sort,' the American answered quickly. 'He's sterling, Willoughby is. Not at all the sort of man that's given away with a

pound of tea. None of your cotton-backed gentlemen. You may test him all through, and you'll find from head to foot he's the genuine material.'

'Couldn't you bring him with you to tea, this afternoon?' Kathleen suggested, half hesitating. 'I think mamma sent you an 'at home' card for Wednesdays.'

'Oh, I'm coming,' the American answered with prompt acquiescence; 'I have not forgotten it, Miss Hesslegrave; is it likely I should? Well, no, I don't think so. But as for Willoughby—ah, there you know, that's quite a different matter. I don't suppose anything on earth would induce him to go to an 'at home' of anybody's. He'd say it was hollow; and he despises hollowness. He'll never go in for anything but realities. To tell you the truth, I think the only reason he spoke to you at all at the Academy here this morning was because he saw a chance of being of some practical service to you; and the moment the practical service was performed, he took the very first opportunity that offered to slip off and leave you. That's Willoughby all over. He cares for nothing at all in life except its realities.'

CHAPTER II.

MRS. HESSLEGRAVE 'AT HOME.'

THAT same afternoon, Mrs. Hesslegrave's little rooms in a side street in Kensington were inconveniently crowded. Mrs. Hesslegrave would have been wounded to the core had it been otherwise. For, though she was poor, she was still 'in Society.' Every second Wednesday through the season Mrs. Hesslegrave re-

ceived; sooner would she have gone without breakfast and dinner than have failed to fill her rooms for afternoon tea with 'the Best People.' Indeed, Mrs. Hesslegrave was the exact antipodes of Arnold Willoughby. 'Twas for the appearances of life she lived, not for its realities. 'It would look so well,' 'it would look so bad'—those were the two phrases that rose oftenest to her lips, the two phrases that summed up in antithetical simplicity her philosophy of conduct.

Therefore it was a small matter to Mrs. Hesslegrave that her friends were jostling and hustling each other to their mutual inconvenience in her tiny lodgings. Their discomfort counted to her for less than nothing. It looks so well to have your 'at homes' attended. It looks so bad to see them empty, or, worse still, filled by the wrong sort of people.

'Oh, here's that dear Mr. Mortimer!' Mrs. Hesslegrave gushed forth, rising with *empressement* as the young American entered. 'How do you do, Mr. Mortimer? How good of you to come! Kathleen, will you take Mr. Mortimer into the other room to have a cup of tea? I'll introduce him to you, Lady Barnard, as soon as ever he comes back. Such a charming young man!' Mrs. Hesslegrave had smoothed her path in life by the judicious use of that one word *charming*. 'He's an American, you know, of course, but not the least like most of them; so cultivated and nice, and belongs, I am told, to a first-rate old Philadelphia family. Really, it's quite surprising what charming Americans one meets about nowadays—the best sort, I mean—the ladies and gentlemen. You wouldn't believe it, but this young man hasn't the slightest Yankee accent; he speaks like an English officer.' Mrs. Hesslegrave's late

lamented husband had been a General of Artillery, and she looked upon an English officer accordingly as the one recognised model of deportment and character in the two hemispheres. 'Besides, he's very well off indeed, they tell me; he's iron in the States, and an artist in Paris; but he practises art for art's sake only, and *not* as a means of livelihood, like my poor dear Kathleen. *Such* a delightful young man! You really *must* know him.'

Lady Barnard smiled, and in less than ten minutes was deep in conversation with the 'charming' American. And charming he was, to say the truth; for once in its life, Mrs. Hesslegrave's overworked adjective of social appreciation was judiciously applied to a proper object. The rich young American had all the piquant frankness and cordiality of his nation, with all the grace and tact of Parisian society. Moreover, he was an artist; and artists must be surely poor creatures to start with if the mere accidents of their profession don't make them interesting. He was chatting away most brightly to Lady Barnard about the internal gossip of Parisian studios, when the door opened once more, and the neat-capped maid with the long white apron announced in her clearest official voice, 'Canon and Mrs. Valentine!'

Their hostess rose once more quite effusively from her place, and advanced towards the new-comers with her best smile of welcome. Mrs. Hesslegrave had no fewer than seven distinct gradations of manner for receiving her guests; and you could gather at once their relative importance in the social scale by observing as they arrived with which of the seven Mrs. Hesslegrave greeted them. It was clear, therefore, that the Valentines were people of distinction; for

she moved forward towards the Canon and his wife at the door with the sweetest inclination of that white-haired head.

'Oh, how good of you to come!' she cried, clasping the lady's hand in both her own. 'I know, Canon Valentine, how *very* much engaged you are! It *is* so sweet of you!'

The Canon was a fat little bald-headed man, rather waistless about the middle, and with a self-satisfied smirk on his smooth red countenance. He had the air of a judge of port and horses. In point of fact, he was a solitary survivor into our alien epoch of the almost extinct type of frankly worldly parson.

'Well, we *are* rather driven, Mrs. Hesslegrave,' he admitted with a sigh—heartless critics might almost have called it a puff—pulling his white tie straight with ostentatious scrupulosity. 'The beginning of the season, you see—torn by conflicting claims; all one's engagements before one! But I've heard *such* good news, such delightful news! I've come here straight, you know, from dear Lady Axminster's.'

'Ah, yes,' Mrs. Hesslegrave echoed, glancing askance towards the American to see if he was listening. 'She *is* so charming, isn't she—Lady Axminster?'

'Quite so,' the Canon answered. 'A very dear old cousin of mine, as you know, Lady Barnard; and so much cut up about this dreadful business of her scapegrace grandson. Well, we've got a clue to him at last; we really believe we've got a genuine clue to him.'

'No, you don't mean to say so!' Mrs. Hesslegrave cried, deeply interested. You would have believed Lady Axminster was her dearest friend, instead of

being merely a distant bowing acquaintance. 'I thought he had gone off to South Africa or somewhere.'

'What? A romance of the peerage?' the young American asked, pricking up his ears. 'A missing lord? A coronet going begging? Lost, stolen, or strayed, the heir to an earldom! Is that about the size of it?'

'Precisely,' the Canon answered, turning towards him, half uncertain whether it was right to encourage so flippant a treatment of a serious subject. 'You've heard of it, no doubt—this unfortunate young man's very awkward disappearance? It's not on his own account, of course, that the family mind; *he* might have gone off if he chose, and nobody would have noticed it. He was always a strange, eccentric sort of person; and for my part, as I say often to dear Lady Axminster, the sooner they could get rid of him out of the way, the better. But it's for Algy she minds; poor Algy Redburn, who, meanwhile, is being kept out of the family property.'

'Well, but this is very interesting, you know,' Rufus Mortimer interjected, as the Canon paused. 'I haven't heard about this. Tell me how it all happened, and why you want a clue. A missing link or a missing earl is always so romantic.'

The Canon leaned back luxuriously in his easy-chair and sipped at the cup of tea Kathleen Hesslegrave had brought him.

'Thank you, my dear,' he said, rolling it critically on his palate. 'One more lump, *if* you please; I always had a sweet tooth, though Sir Everard has just cut me off my sugar. Says I must take saccharin; but there isn't any flavour in it. I'm thankful to say, however, he hasn't cut me off my port, which

is always something. Said he to me: "I'll tell you what it is, Canon; if you drink port, you'll have the gout; but if you don't drink port, the gout 'll have *you*." So that's highly satisfactory.' And the bald-headed old gentleman took another sip at the sweet syrup in his cup, of which the tea itself only formed the medium.

'But how about Lord Axminster?' the American persisted, with the insistence of his countrymen.

'Oh, ah, poor Axminster!' the Canon went on reflectively, stirring the liquid in his cup with his gilt-bowled apostle spoon. (Mrs. Hesslegrave was by no means rich, and she lived in lodgings, to her shame, during her annual visit to London, but she flattered herself she knew the proper way to provide afternoon tea for the best society.) 'I was coming to that. It's a sad, bad story. To begin with, you know, every romance of the peerage involves a pedigree. Well, old Lady Axminster—that's my cousin, the dowager—she had two sons; the eldest was the late earl; Mad Axminster they called him, who married a gipsy girl, and was the father of the present man, if he *is* the present man—that is to say if he's still living.'

'The missing lord, in fact?' Rufus Mortimer put in interrogatively.

'Quite so,' the Canon assented—'the missing lord; who is, therefore, you will see, my cousin Maria's grandchild. But Maria never cared for the lad. From his childhood upwards, that boy Bertie had ideas and habits sadly unbefitting that station in life, et cætera, et cætera. He had always a mania for doing some definite work in the world, as he called it—soiling his hands in the vineries, or helping the

stable-boys, or mending broken chairs, or pottering about the grounds with an axe or a shovel. He had the soul of an under-gardener. His father was just as bad; picked up wonderful notions about equality, and Christian brotherhood, and self-help, and so forth. But it came out worse in Bertie—his name was Albert; I suppose the gipsy mother had something or other to do with it. I'm a great believer in heredity, you know, Lady Barnard, heredity's everything. If once you let any inferior blood like that into a good old family, there's no knowing what trouble you may be laying in store for yourself.'

'But Galton says,' the young American was bold enough to interpose, 'that all the vigour and energy of the British aristocracy—when they happen to have any—comes really from their *mésalliances*; from the handsome, strong, and often clever young women of the lower orders—actresses and so forth—whom they occasionally marry.'

The Canon stared hard at him. These might be scientific truths indeed, not unworthy of discussion at the British Association, but they ought not to be unexpectedly flung down like bomb-shells in an innocent drawing-room of aristocratic Kensington.

'That may be so,' he answered chillily. 'I have not read Mr. Galton's argument on the subject with the care and attention which no doubt it merits. But gipsies are gipsies, and monomania is monomania—with all due respect to scientific authority. So, at an early age, as I was about to observe, these bad ancestral traits began to come out in Bertie. He insisted upon it that he ought to do some good work in the world—which was very right and proper, of

course; I hope we all of us share his opinion on *that* score,' the Canon continued, checking himself, and dropping for a moment into his professional manner. 'But then, his unfortunate limitation of view to what I will venture to call the gipsy horizon made him fail to see that the proper world in the work of an English nobleman is—is——'

'To behave as sich,' the irreverent young American suggested parenthetically.

Canon Valentine regarded him with a peering look out of his small black eyes. He had a vague suspicion that this bold young man was really trying to chaff him; and one should abstain from chaffing a beneficed clergyman of the Church of England. But he thought it on the whole wisest and most dignified to treat the remark as a serious contribution to a serious conversation.

'Quite so,' he answered with a forced smile. 'You put it briefly but succinctly. To fulfil, as far as in him lies, the natural duties and functions of his—ah'm—exalted position. Bertie didn't see that. He was always stupidly wishing he was a shoemaker or a carpenter. If you make a pair of shoes, he used to say, you do an undoubted and indubitable service to the community at large; a man goes dryshod for a year in your handiwork: if you give a vote in Parliament or develop the resources of your own estate, the value of your work for the world, he used often to tell me, was more open to question.'

'Pre-cisely,' the American answered, with a most annoying tone of complete acquiescence.

The Canon stared at him once more. He expected such singular views as his unfortunate kinsman's to rouse at once every sensible person's reprobation.

For he had not yet discovered that the world at large is beginning to demand of every man, be he high or low, that he should justify his presence in a civilized nation by doing some useful work, in one capacity or another, for the community that feeds and clothes and supports him.

'Very odd notions, indeed,' he murmured half to himself, as a rebuke to the young American. 'But then, his father was mad, and his mother was a gipsy girl.'

'So at last Lord Axminster disappeared?' the American continued, anxious to learn the end of this curious story.

'At last he disappeared,' the Canon went on, somewhat dryly. 'He disappeared into space in the most determined fashion. 'Twas like the bursting of a soap bubble. He wasn't spirited away. He took good care nobody should ever fancy that. He left a letter behind, saying he was going forth to do some good in the world, and a power of attorney for his grandmother to manage the Axminster property. His father and mother were dead, and Maria was the nearest relative he had left him. But he disappeared into space, drawing no funds from the estate, and living apparently upon whatever he earned as a gardener or a shoemaker. And from that day to this nothing has since been heard of him.'

'Wasn't there a lady in the case, though?' Mrs. Hesslegrave suggested, just to show her familiarity with the small-talk of society.

The Canon recollected himself.

'Oh yes; I forgot to say that,' he answered. 'You're quite right, Mrs. Hesslegrave. It was *cherchez la femme*, of course, as usual. Bertie had

been engaged to a girl of whom he was passionately fond; but she threw him overboard; I must say myself, though I never cared for the boy, she threw him overboard most cruelly and unjustifiably. In point of fact, between ourselves, she had a better offer. An offer from a marquis, a wealthy marquis. Axminster was poor, for a man in his position, you understand; these things are relative; and the girl threw him overboard. I won't mention her name, because this is all a family matter; but she's a marchioness now, and universally admired. Though I must admit she behaved badly to Bertie.'

'Shook his faith in women, I expect?' the American suggested.

'Entirely,' the Canon answered. 'That's just what he wrote in his last letter. It gave him a distaste for society, he said. He preferred to live henceforth in a wider world, where a man's personal qualities counted for more than his wealth, his family, or his artificial position. I suppose he meant America.'

'If he did,' Mortimer put in with a meaning smile, 'I should reckon he knew very little about our country.'

'And you say you've got a clue?' Mrs. Hesslegrave interposed. 'What is it, Canon?'

The Canon wagged his head.

'Ah, that's it,' he echoed. 'That's just it. What is it? Well, Maria has found out—clever woman, Maria—that he sailed from London three years ago, under the assumed name of Douglas Overton, in a ship whose exact title I don't remember—the *Saucy* something-or-other—for Melbourne or Sydney. And now we're in hopes we may really track him.'

'But if you don't care about him, and the family's

well quit of him,' the American interjected, 'why on earth do you want to?'

Canon Valentine turned to him with an almost shocked expression of countenance.

'Oh, we don't want to *find* him,' he said, in a deprecatory voice. 'We don't want to *find* him. Very much the contrary. What we want to do is really to prove him dead; and as the *Saucy* something-or-other, from London to Melbourne, went ashore on her way out in the Indian Ocean somewhere, we're very much in hopes—that is to say, we fear—or, rather, we think it possible, that every soul on board her perished.'

'Excellent material for a second Tichborne case,' Mrs. Hesslegrave suggested.

The Canon pursed his lips.

'We'll hope not,' he answered. 'For poor Algy's sake, we'll hope not, Mrs. Hesslegrave. Algy's his cousin. Mad Axminster had one brother, the Honourable Algernon, who was Algy's father. You see, the trouble of it is, by going away like this and leaving no address, Bertie made it impossible for us to settle his affairs and behave rightly to the family. He's keeping poor Algy out of his own, don't you see? That's just where the trouble is.'

'If he's dead,' Rufus Mortimer suggested with American common-sense; 'but not if he's living.'

'But we'll hope——' the Canon began; then he checked himself suddenly. 'We'll hope,' he went on with a dexterous after-thought, 'this clue Maria has got will settle the question at last, one way or the other.'

'Oh, here's Mrs. Burleigh!' the hostess exclaimed, rising once more from her seat with the manner suitable for receiving a distinguished visitor. 'So glad

to see you at last. When did you come up from that lovely Norchester? And how's the dear Bishop?'

'I knew Axminster at Oxford,' a very quiet young man in the corner, who had been silent till then, observed in a low voice to Rufus Mortimer. 'I mean the present man—the missing earl—the gipsy's son, as Canon Valentine calls him. I can't say I ever thought him the least bit mad, except in the way of being conscientious, if that's to be taken as a sign of madness. He hated wine-parties, which was not unnatural, considering his grandfather had drunk himself to death, and one of his uncles had to be confined as an habitual inebriate; and he liked manual labour, which was not unnatural either; for he was a splendidly athletic fellow, as fine-built a man as ever I saw, and able to do a good day's work with any navvy in Britain. But he was perfectly sane, and a martyr to conscience. He felt this girl's treatment of him very much, I believe—you know who it was—Lady Sark, the celebrated beauty; and he also felt that people treated him very differently when they knew he was Lord Axminster from the way they treated him when he went about the coast as a common sailor, in a little tub fishing yacht, which he was fond of doing. And that made him long to live a life as a man, not as an earl, in order that he might see what there really was in him.'

'A very odd taste,' the young Philadelphian replied. 'Now, I for my part like best to live among people who know all about me and my grandfather, the Vice-president, who made the family pile; because, when I go outside my own proper circle, I see people only value me at my worth as a man—which I suppose

must be just about twelve shillings a week, and no allowance for beer-money.'

At the very same moment, in the opposite corner of the room, Canon Valentine was saying under his breath to Mrs. Hesslegrave:

'Who *is* that young man—the very flippant young fellow with the straw-coloured moustache? I can't say at first sight I'm exactly taken with him.'

And Mrs. Hesslegrave made answer with the wisdom of the serpent:

'No, not *at first sight*, perhaps; I can understand that: he's American, of course, and a leetle bit brusque in his manner, to begin with: but when you know him, he's charming. Has *lovely* rooms in Paris, near the Arc de Triomphe; and a palazzo in Venice on the Grand Canal; and gives delightful receptions. He's taken a house in Stanhope Street this year for the season. I'll get him to send you cards; his afternoons are celebrated: and when you go to Paris, he'll make everything smooth for you. He can do so much! He has influence at the Embassy.'

American? Yes. But what a match he would make, after all, for dear Kathleen!

CHAPTER III.

MILLIONAIRE AND SAILOR.

While these things were being said of him in the side street in Kensington, Albert Ogilvie Redburn, seventh Earl of Axminster, *alias* Arnold Willoughby, *alias* Douglas Overton, was walking quietly by himself down

Piccadilly, and not a soul of all he met was taking the slightest notice of him.

It was many years since he had last been in town, and, accustomed as he was to his changed position, the contrast could not fail to strike him forcibly. Ladies he had once known dashed past him in smart victorias without a nod or a smile; men he had often played with at the Flamingo Club stared him blankly in the face and strolled by, unrecognising; the crossing-sweeper at the corner, who used to turn up to him a cringing face, with a 'Gi' me a penny, my lord,' now scarcely seemed to notice his presence on the pavement. 'If you really want to know how insignificant you are,' Arnold thought to himself for the fiftieth time, 'viewed as a mere human being, all you've got to do is just to doff your frock-coat, pull the flower from your button-hole, forget you're a lord, and come down to the ordinary level of work-a-day humanity. It's a hard life before the mast, on a Dundee sealer; and it's almost harder in its way, this trying to earn enough to live upon with one's pencil; but it's worth going through, after all, if only for the sake of feeling one's self face to face with the realities of existence. I never should have found out, now, how poor a creature I really was—or how strong a one either—if I hadn't put my worth quite fairly to the test in this practical manner. It makes a man realise his market value.—As it is, I know I'm a tolerable A.B., and a very mediocre hand at a paying seascape.'

It was not without difficulty, indeed, that Arnold Willoughby (to call him by the only name that now generally belonged to him) had managed thus to escape his own personality. Many young men of

twenty-seven, it is true, might readily shuffle off their friends and acquaintances, and might disappear in the common ruck, no man suspecting them; though even for a commoner, that's a far more difficult task than you might imagine, when you come to try it. But for a peer of the realm to vanish into space like a burnt-out fire-balloon is a far more serious and arduous undertaking. He knows so many men, and so many men know him. So, when Albert Ogilvie Redburn, Earl of Axminster, made up his mind to fade away into thin air, giving place at last to Arnold Willoughby, he was forced to do it with no small deliberation.

It would not be enough for him to change no more than his name and costume. In London, New York, Calcutta, Rio, Yokohama, there were people who might any day turn up and recognise him. His disguise, to succeed, must be better than superficial. But he was equal to the occasion. He had no need for hurry; it was not as though the police were on his track in hot haste; time after time, his disguise might be detected, but he could learn by his errors how to make it safer for the future. His one desire was to get rid for ever of that incubus of a historical name and a great position in the county which made it impossible for him to know life as it was, without the cloaks and pretences of flunkeys and sycophants. He wished to find out his own market value.

His first attempt, therefore, was to ship on board an outward-bound vessel as a common sailor. From childhood upward he had been accustomed to yachts, and had always been fond of managing the rigging. So he found little difficulty in getting a place on board during a sailors' strike, and making a voyage as far as

Cape Town. At the Cape, he had transferred himself by arrangement on purpose to a homeward-bound ship; partly in order to make it more difficult for his cousins to trace him, but partly, too, in order to return a little sooner to England. He thus accidentally escaped the fate to which Canon Valentine so devoutly desired to consign him in the Indian Ocean. Arriving home in his common sailor clothes, at Liverpool he determined to carry out a notable experiment. He had read in a newspaper which he found on board a most curious account of one Silas Quackenboss, an American face doctor, who undertook to make the plainest faces beautiful, not by mere skin-deep devices, but by surgical treatment of the muscles and cartilages of the human countenance. The runaway earl made up his mind to put himself through a regular course of physical treatment at the hands of this distinguished American Professor of the art of disguises. The result exceeded his utmost expectations. His very features came out of the process so altered that, as the Professor proudly affirmed, 'India-rubber wasn't in it,' and 'His own mother wouldn't have known him.' It was no mere passing change that had thus been effected; he was externally a new person: the man's whole expression and air were something quite different. The missing earl had arrived at Liverpool as Douglas Overton; he left it three weeks later as Arnold Willoughby, with an almost perfect confidence that not a soul on earth would ever again be able to recognise him.

Of course, he had not confided the secret of his personality to the American quack, who probably believed he was assisting some criminal to escape from justice, and who pocketed his fee in that simple belief

without a qualm of conscience. So, when he sailed from Liverpool again in his new character as Arnold Willoughby, it was in the confident hope that he had shuffled off for ever his earldom, with its accompanying limitations of view, and stood forth before the world a new and free man, face to face at last with the realities and difficulties of normal self-supporting human existence. 'Now I live like a man,' Nero said to himself, when he had covered half the site of burnt Rome with his Golden House. 'Now I live like a man,' the self-deposed earl exclaimed in the exact opposite spirit, as he munched the dry biscuit and coarse salt pork of the common sailor on the *Dudley Castle*.

Three years at sea, however, began to tell in time even upon Arnold Willoughby's splendid physique; he had to acknowledge at last that early training to hardships, too, counts for something. His lungs, it turned out, were beginning to be affected. He consulted a doctor; and the doctor advised him to quit the sea, and take up, if possible, with some more sedentary indoor occupation. Above all, he warned him against spending the winters in northern seas, and recommended him, if a land-lubber's life was out of the question, to ship as much as practicable in the colder months for tropical voyages. Arnold smiled to himself at the very different spirit in which the medical man approached the sailor's case from the way in which he would have approached the case of Lord Axminster; but he was accustomed by this time to perfect self-repression on all these matters. He merely answered, touching an imaginary hat by pure force of acquired habit as he spoke, that he thought he knew a way in which he could earn a decent liveli-

hood on shore if he chose; and that he would avoid in future winter voyages in high latitudes. But as the bronzed and weather-beaten sailor laid down his guinea manfully and walked out of the room, the doctor said to himself with a little start of surprise, 'That man speaks and behaves with the manners of a gentleman.'

When Arnold Willoughby, as he had long learned to call himself, even in his own mind (for it was the earnest desire of his life now to fling away for ever the least taint or relic of his original position) began to look about him for the means of earning that honest livelihood of which he had spoken so confidently to the doctor, he found in a very short time it was a more difficult task than he had at first contemplated. He did not desire, indeed, to give up the sea altogether. The man who carries useful commodities from country to country fulfils as undeniable a service to the State as the man who makes a pair of good shoes, or builds a warm house, or weaves a yard of broadcloth. And of such visible and tangible service to his fellow men, Arnold Willoughby was profoundly enamoured. He couldn't bear to give up his chosen profession in spite of, or perhaps even because of, its undeniable hardships. Still, he didn't desire to commit what would be practical suicide by remaining at sea through the northern winter. It occurred to him, therefore, that he might divide his time between winter and summer in different pursuits. He had always had a great inherited taste for art, and had studied, 'when he was a gentleman,' as he used to phrase it to himself, in a Paris studio. There he had acquired a fair though by no means exhaustive knowledge of the technique of painting, and he determined to try, for one winter at least,

whether he could supplement the sea by his pictorial talent.

But it is one thing to paint or sing or write for your own amusement as an amateur, and quite another thing to take up any of these artistic pursuits as a means of livelihood. Arnold soon found he would have enough to do to get through the winter at Venice on his own small savings. When he left Membury Castle, near Axminster, three years before, he left it and all it meant to him behind him for ever. He had taken a solitary half-crown in his waistcoat pocket, that being the traditional amount with which the British sailor is supposed to leave home; and he had never again drawn upon the estate for a penny. He didn't want to play at facing the realities of life, but really to face them. If he could fall back from time to time upon the Axminster property to tide him over a bad place, he would have felt himself an impostor—an impostor to himself, untrue to his own inmost beliefs and convictions. Whether he was right or wrong, at any rate he felt so. He wanted to know what he was really worth. He must stand or fall by his own efforts now, like the enormous mass of his fellow-countrymen.

So all that winter in Venice, the resolute young man, now inured to penury, lived, as Rufus Mortimer put it, down a side canal off Italian *fritura* at three meals a penny; lived, and thrived on it, and used up his savings: and appeared at last in London that spring with the picture he had painted, anxious to pit himself, in this as in other things, on equal terms against his fellow-craftsmen.

As he walked down Piccadilly, gazing somewhat aimlessly into the windows of the picture shops, and wondering whether anybody would ever buy his

'Chioggia Fisher-boats,' he suddenly felt a hand clapped on his shoulder, and turned round, half terrified, to observe who stopped him. Had some member of his old club, in front of which he was just passing, seen through the double disguise of burnt skin and altered features? But no. He recognised at a glance it was only Rufus Mortimer, tired of the inanities of afternoon tea at Mrs. Hesslegrave's rooms, and escaping from the Canon on the Tithes Commutation Bill.

'For what port are you bound?' the young American asked, running his arm spontaneously through his casual acquaintance's; and Arnold liked him for the action, it was so frank and friendly.

'No port in particular,' Willoughby answered with his cheery smile. 'I'm driven out of my course—storm-bound, in point of fact, and scudding under bare poles in search of a harbour.'

The American seized at once upon the meaning that underlay this quaint nautical phraseology. 'I suspected as much,' he replied, with genuine good-nature, looking hard at his man. 'It was a disappointment to you, I'm afraid, not getting your picture taken.'

The sailor half-coloured. He was prepared for almost anything on earth except sympathy. 'Oh, not much,' he answered with his breezy carelessness—the brisk *nonchalance* of the born-aristocrat was one of the few traits of his rank and class he had never even attempted to get rid of, consciously or unconsciously. 'I should have liked to have it taken, of course; but if it isn't worth taking, why it'll do me good to be taught my proper place in the scale of humanity and the scale of painters. One feels at least one has been judged with the ruck, and that's

always a comfort. One's been beaten outright, on a fair field and no favour.'

'It's a queer sort of consolation,' the American answered, smiling. 'For my own part, I'm in the same box, and I confess I don't like it. Though, with me, of course, it doesn't matter financially; it's only my *amour propre*, not my purse, that's hurt by it.'

Arnold liked this frank recognition of the gulf between their positions. 'Well, that *does* make a difference,' he said; 'there's no denying it. I counted upon selling this picture to go on painting next winter. As it is, I'm afraid I shall have to turn to some other occupation. I can't earn enough at sea in one summer to keep me alive and find me in painting materials during the winter after it.'

Rufus Mortimer gave a sudden little start of surprise.

'Why, I never thought of that!' he cried. 'One-half the world doesn't know how the other half lives—in spite of the constant efforts of the society journalists to enlighten it on the subject. I suppose to you, now, canvas and paint, and so forth, cost something considerable. And yet one never before so much as thought of them as an element in one's budget.'

'They're a very serious item,' Arnold answered, with that curious suppressed smile that was almost habitual to him.

'Then, what do you mean to do?' the American asked, turning round upon him.

'I hardly know yet myself,' Arnold answered, still carelessly. 'It doesn't much matter. Nothing matters, in point of fact; and if it does, never mind—I mean

to say, personally. One lone ant in the hive is hardly worth making a fuss about.'

'Where are you going to dine?' the American put in with a sudden impulse.

Thus unexpectedly driven to close quarters, Arnold replied with equal truth and candour:

'I'm not going to dine anywhere. To say the plain fact, I didn't think of dining.'

'Why not?' Mortimer persisted.

'Because,' the other answered, with a very amused look, 'I don't happen to possess the wherewithal to dine upon.'

'Have a chop with me at the Burlington,' the American interposed with genuine friendliness, 'and let's talk this over afterwards.'

'If I'd meant to accept an invitation to dinner,' the sailor answered proudly, with just a tinge of the earl showing dimly through, 'I would certainly *not* have mentioned to you that I happened to be minus one.'

Mortimer looked at him with a puzzled air.

'Well, you *are* a queer fellow!' he said. 'One can never understand you. Do you really mean to say you're not going to dine at all this evening?'

'Sailors learn to go short in the matter of food and sleep,' Arnold replied, with a faint shrug. 'It becomes a second nature to one. I'm certain you're thinking a great deal more of it than I am myself this moment. Let me be perfectly open with you. I've reached my last penny, except the few shillings I have in my pocket to pay my landlady down at Wapping. Very well, then, it would be dishonest of me to dine and leave her unpaid. So I must go without anything to

eat to-night, and look about me to-morrow for a ship to sail in.'

'And next winter?' Mortimer asked.

'Well, next winter, if possible, I shall try to paint again. Should that fail, I must turn my hand to some other means of livelihood.'

'What a philosopher you are!' the American exclaimed, astonished. 'And what a lesson to fellows like us, who were born and brought up in the lap of luxury, and complain to the committee if the *chef* at the club serves up our cutlets without *sauce piquante!* But there! I suppose you other chaps get used to it.'

Albert Ogilvie Redburn, seventh Earl of Axminster, smiled once more that quiet little self-restrained smile of his; but Arnold Willoughby it was who replied with good humour:

'I suppose we do. At any rate, I shall try to ship southward to-morrow.'

'Shall I tell you the truth?' the young American asked suddenly.

'It's the one desire of my life to hear it,' Arnold answered with sincerity.

'Well, I'll tell you what it is; I like you very much, and I admire you immensely. I think you're solid. But I watched those Chioggia boats of yours when you were painting them at Venice. You're a precious clever fellow, and you have imagination, and taste, and all that sort of thing; but your technique's deficient. And technique's everything nowadays. You don't know enough about painting, that's the truth, to paint for the market. What you want is to go for a year or two to Paris, and study, study, study as hard as you can work at it. Art's an exacting

mistress. She claims the whole of you. It's no good thinking nowadays you can navigate half the year and paint the other half. The world has revolved out of that by this time. You should give up the sea and take to art quite seriously.'

'Thank you for your kindness and frankness,' Arnold replied with genuine feeling, for he saw the American was doing that very rare thing—really thinking about another person's interests. 'It's good of you to trouble yourself about my professional prospects.'

'But don't you agree with me?'

'Oh, perfectly. I see I still sadly want training.'

There was a moment's pause. Then the American spoke again.

'What are you going to do,' he asked, 'about your Chioggia Fisher-boats, if you mean to sail to-morrow?'

'I had thought of offering them on commission to some dealer; and if nobody rose to the fly, taking the canvas back again to Venice next winter, and painting it over with another picture.'

Rufus Mortimer paused a moment. This was a delicate matter. Then he said, in a rather constrained, half-hesitating way:

'Suppose you were to leave it with me, and see whether I could manage or not to dispose of it?'

A round red spot burned bright in Arnold Willoughby's cheek. He flushed like a girl with sudden emotion. All the rent-roll of the Axminster estates was waiting for him in Lincoln's Inn, if he had cared to take it; but, by his own deliberate design, he had cut himself off from it; and, sink or swim, he would not now, after putting his hand to the plough,

turn back again. He would starve sooner. But the generous offer thus delicately cloaked half unmanned his resolution.

'My dear fellow,' he exclaimed, turning round to the American, 'how much too good you are! Not for worlds would I leave it with you. I know what you mean, and I am no less grateful to you than if I accepted your offer. It isn't often one meets with such genuine kindness. But for character's sake, I prefer to worry through my own way, unaided. That's a principle in life with me. But thank you all the same; thank you, thank you, thank you!'

He stood for a moment irresolute. Tears trembled in his eyes. He could put up with anything on earth but kindness. Then he wrung his friend's hand hard, and with a sudden impulse darted down a side street in the direction of St. James's.

The American gazed after him with no little interest.

'That's a brave fellow,' he said to himself, as Arnold disappeared round a corner in the distance. 'But he won't go down just yet. He has far too much pluck to let himself sink easily. I expect I shall find him next autumn at Venice.'

CHAPTER IV.

FRATERNAL AMENITIES.

The season was waning towards its latter end; Mrs. Hesslegrave and Kathleen were on the eve of flight for their regular round of autumn visits in the country, before returning to their winter quarters at

Venice. These autumn visits were half friendly, half professional. It was one of the griefs of Mrs. Hesslegrave's life, indeed, that Kathleen's vocation as an artist compelled her to do and to suffer many things which in her mother's eyes were undignified, and almost unladylike. Foremost among them was the necessity, when visiting in the country, for carrying her portfolio of sketches along with her; for Kathleen's success was merely a private and local one; she depended largely for selling her pictures upon the friendly appreciation of her own acquaintances. It is true, being a timid and retiring girl, she never thrust her work incontinently upon her hosts; on the contrary, she was nervously shy about anything that looked like self-advertisement or pushing. Still, the fact remained that unless she went a round of country visits in the autumn she would never have sold most of her pictures at all; and this fact, which gave Kathleen herself no small shrinkings of natural delicacy, covered Mrs. Hesslegrave in a very different way with shame and humiliation.

For to Mrs. Hesslegrave it was a painful and disgraceful thing that people should know her daughter had to work for her living at all; in *her* young days, she was wont to say severely, young ladies used to paint for their own amusement, not for filthy lucre: and whenever she said it, with a disapproving toss of the dainty coffee-coloured Honiton head-dress, Kathleen had somehow an unpleasant feeling in the background of her heart that it was really very wrong of her to be so badly off, and that if only she had inherited the feelings and manners of a perfect lady, she would have managed to be born with five thou-

sand a year, and nothing to do for it. Though, to be sure, if she hadn't so managed, after all, it might with some show of reason be urged in extenuation that the fault lay rather at the door of that impeccable Mrs. Hesslegrave herself, and the late lamented General of Artillery, her husband, who had been jointly responsible for bringing Kathleen into the world with no better endowment than just a pair of pretty white hands, and an artistic faculty for deftly employing them in the production of beautiful and pleasing images.

On this particular evening, however, Kathleen was tired with packing; her head ached slightly; and she was anxious to be kept as undisturbed as possible. Therefore, of course, her brother Reginald had chosen it as the aptest moment to drop in towards the dinner-hour for a farewell visit to his mother and sister. Reginald was twenty, with a faint black line on his upper lip—which he called a moustache—and he was a child entirely after Mrs. Hesslegrave's own heart; in his mother's eyes, indeed, a consummate gentleman. To be sure, the poor boy had the misfortune to be engaged in an office in the City—a most painful position: Mrs. Hesslegrave's narrow means had never allowed her to send him to Sandhurst or Woolwich and get him a commission in the army—but *that* the fond mother regarded as poor Reggie's ill-luck; and Reggie himself endeavoured to make up for it by copying to the best of his ability the tone and manner of military circles, as far as was compatible with the strict routine of a stockbroker's office. If collars and cuffs and the last thing out in octagon ties constitute the real criterion of the gentle life (as is the *naïve* belief of so large a fraction of the

City), then was Reginald Hesslegrave indeed a gentleman. What though he subsisted in great part on poor Kathleen's earnings, and pocketed her hard-won cash to supplement his own narrow salary, with scarcely so much as a 'thank you'—one doesn't like to seem beholden to a woman in these matters, you know—yet was the cut of his coats a marvel to Adam's Court, and the pattern of his sleeve-links a thing to be observed by the stipendiary youth of Threadneedle Street and Lothbury.

Reginald flung himself down in the big easy-chair by the bow window with the air of a man who drops in for a moment to counsel, advise, assist, and overlook his womenkind—in short, with all the dignity of the head of the family. He was annoyed that 'his people' were leaving town; leave they must, sooner or later, of course; if they didn't, how could Kathleen ever dispose of those precious daubs of hers?—for though Reginald pocketed poor Kathleen's sovereigns with the utmost calm of a great spirit, he always affected profoundly to despise the dubious art that produced them. Still, the actual moment of his people's going was always a disagreeable one to Reginald Hesslegrave. As long as mother and Kitty stopped on in town, he had somewhere respectable to spend his evenings, if he wished to; somewhere presentable to which he could bring other fellows at no expense to himself; and *that*, don't you know, is always a consideration! As soon as they were gone, there was nothing for it but the club; and at the club, that sordid place, they make a man pay himself for whatever he consumes, and whatever he offers in solid or liquid hospitality to other fellows. So no matter how late mother and Kitty stayed in town, it

made Reggie cross, all the same, when the day came for their departure.

'How badly you do up your back-hair, Kitty!' Reggie observed with a sweet smile of provocation, after a few other critical remarks upon his sister's appearance. 'You put no style into it. You ought just to look at Mrs. Algy Redburn's hair! There's art if you like. She does it in a bun. She knows how to dress it. It's a model for a duchess!'

'Mrs. Algy Redburn keeps a maid, no doubt,' his sister answered, leaning back in her chair a little wearily, for she was worn out with packing. 'So the credit of her bun belongs, of course, to the maid who dresses it.'

'She keeps a maid,' Reggie went on, with his hands on his haunches in an argumentative attitude. 'Why, certainly, she keeps a maid. What else would you expect? Every lady keeps a maid. It's a simple necessity. And *you* ought to keep a maid, too. No woman can be dressed as a lady should dress, if she doesn't keep a maid. The thing's impossible.' And he snapped his mouth to like a patent rat-trap.

'Then I must be content to dress otherwise than as a lady should,' Kathleen responded quietly; 'for I can't afford a maid—and to tell you the truth, Reggie, I really don't know that I should care to have one!'

'Can't afford!' Reggie repeated with a derisive accent of profound scorn. 'That's what you always say. I hate to hear you say it. The phrase is unladylike. If you can't afford anything, you ought to be able to afford it. How do *I* afford things? I dress like a gentleman. You never see *me* ill-tailored or

ill-groomed, or doing without anything a gentleman ought to have. How do *I* afford it?'

Kathleen had it on the tip of her tongue to give back the plain and true retort, 'Why, by making your sister earn the money to keep you;' but native kindliness and womanly feeling restrained her from saying so. So she only replied:

'I'm sure I don't know, my dear; I often wonder: for *I* can't afford it, and I earn more than you do.'

Reggie winced a little at that. It was mean of Kitty so to twit him with his poverty. She was always flinging his want of ready-money in his face—as though want of money (when you spend every penny that fate allows you—and a little more too) were a disgrace to any gentleman! But he continued none the less in the same lordly strain:

'You dress badly; that's the fact of it. No woman should spend less than three hundred a year on her own wardrobe! It can't be done for one shilling under that. She *ought* to spend it.'

'Not if she hasn't got it,' Kathleen answered stoutly.

'Whether she's got it or not,' Reggie responded at once, with profound contempt for such unladylike morality. 'Look at Mrs. Algy Redburn! How does she do, I'd like to know? Everybody's well aware Algy hasn't got a brass farthing to bless himself with; yet who do you see dressed in the Park like his wife? Such bonnets! Such coats! Such a bun! There's a model for you!'

'But Mrs. Algy Redburn will some day be Lady Axminster,' Kathleen answered with a sigh, not perceiving herself that that vague contingency had really nothing at all to do with the rights and wrongs of the

question. 'And I will not.' (Which was also to some extent an unwarrantable assumption.)

Reggie flashed his cuffs, and regarded them with just pride.

'That's no matter,' he answered curtly. 'Every lady *is* a lady, and should dress like a lady, no matter what's her income. And she can't do that under three hundred a year. You take my word for it.'

Kathleen was too tired to keep up the dispute. So she answered nothing.

But Reggie had come round to his sister's that night in the familiar masculine teasing humour. He wasn't going to be balked of his sport so easily. 'Twas as good as ratting, at half the cost, and almost equal to badger-drawing. So he went on after a minute:

'A man doesn't need so much. His wants are simpler. I think I can dress like a gentleman myself —on two hundred and fifty.'

'As your salary's eighty,' Kathleen put in resignedly, with one hand on her aching head, 'I don't quite know myself where the remainder's to come from.'

Reggie parried the question.

'Oh, I'm careful,' he went on—'very careful, you know, Kitty. I make it a rule never to *waste* my money. I buy judiciously. Look at linen, for example. Linen's a very important item. I require a fresh shirt, of course, every morning. Even *you* will admit' (he spoke with acerbity, as though Kathleen were a sort of acknowledged social Pariah)—'even *you* will admit that a supply of clean linen is a necessary adjunct to a gentleman's appearance. Well, how do you think, now, I manage about my cuffs? I'll tell you what I do about them. There are fellows at our place, if you'll believe it, who wear movable cuffs—cuffs,

don't you know, that come off and on the same as a collar does: nasty separate shirt cuffs. I don't call such things gentlemanly. The fellows that wear them take them off when they come to the office, and slip them on again over their hands when they have to run across with a client to the House—that's what we call the Stock Exchange—or when they go out for luncheon. Well, I don't like such ways myself. I hate and detest all shams and subterfuges. I wouldn't wear a cuff unless it was part and parcel of my shirt. So I've invented a dodge to keep them clean from morning till evening. As soon as I go into the office, I just cut a piece of white foolscap the exact size of my cuffs; I double it back, so, over the edge of the sleeve; I pass it under again, this way. Then, while I stop in the office, I keep the cover on; and it looks pretty much the same as the linen. That prevents blacks and smuts from settling on the cuff, and keeps the wear and tear of writing and so forth from hurting the material. But when I go out, I just slip the paper off, so!—and there I am, you see, with spotless linen, like a gentleman!' And he demonstrated triumphantly.

'A most ingenious dodge!' Kathleen answered with languid interest.

'Yes, it's careful of me,' Reggie went on; 'I'm naturally careful. And by such strict bits of economy I expect in the end—to keep down my expenditure on dress to two hundred and fifty.'

Kathleen smiled very faintly.

'You don't think a fellow can do it on less, do you?' Reggie continued once more in an argumentative spirit.

'Yes, I do,' Kathleen replied. 'I certainly think

so. And if he's a man, and can't afford to spend so much, I think he should be ashamed of himself for talking such nonsense.'

'Well, but look here, you know,' Reggie began, 'what's a man to do? You just think of it this way! First, he must have a dress suit once a year, of course; you'll admit that's a necessity. Gloves and white ties—those he *needs* for evening. Then a frock coat and waistcoat, with trousers to match; and a black cutaway lot for afternoon tea; and two suits of dittos for country wear; and a tweed with knickerbockers for shooting and so forth; and a tennis coat, and boating flannels, and——'

'Oh, don't, Reggie!' his sister cried, shrinking away and clapping her hands to her aching head. 'You comb my brain! I'm too tired to argue with you!'

'That's just it,' Reggie continued, delighted. 'You live in wretched lodgings, with no proper food—your cook's atrocious—and you work till you drop at your beastly painting; and you tire yourself out with packing your own boxes, instead of keeping a maid, who'd do it all like a shot for you; and what's the consequence? Why, you're unfit for society! When a fellow comes round to pay you a visit after a hard day's work, and expects a little relaxation and stimulating talk with the ladies of his family, he finds you worn out—a mere boiled rag; while as to music, or conversation, or some agreeable chat—oh, dear me, no! not the ghost of an idea of it!'

Kathleen's patience was exhausted.

'My dear boy,' she said half angrily, 'I *have* to work to keep myself alive, and you, too, into the bargain. And if you expect me to supply you with

two hundred a year to spend upon your wardrobe, why, you must at least consent to give up the pleasure of music in the evenings.'

What Reginald might have answered to this unexpected attack remains an unknown fact in the history of the universe; for just at that minute the neat-capped little waiting-maid of the Kensington lodgings opened the door with a flourish and announced, 'Mr. Mortimer!'

The young American entered with undisguised alacrity, and gazed delighted around the room.

'Mrs. Hesslegrave is *out*, I hear,' he began with meaning, as he took Kathleen's hand. Then he started a little in surprise as Reginald rose from the chair where he had been sitting, unseen. 'But your brother's here,' he added in a disappointed afterthought, whose distinct tone of regret must needs have struck anybody less self-centred and self-satisfied than the stockbroker's assistant.

'Yes, I dropped round to say good-bye to my people to-night,' Reggie answered with a drawl, caressing that budding black line on his upper lip with all a hobbledehoy's affection. 'They're off on a round of visits in the country just now. Hard lines on me! I shall be left all alone by myself in London!'

Rufus Mortimer surveyed him from head to foot with a comprehensive glance, which seemed to say, about as clear as looks could say it, that whatever he did he wouldn't be much missed anywhere—especially just at that moment; but being a polite young man, after his own lights, he failed to put his idea into words for the present. He merely sat down on the divan, not far from Kathleen, and began to talk with

her about art (a subject which invariably bored Mr. Reginald), taking not the slightest notice in any way all the while of her brother's presence. Before he knew it almost, they were away in Florence: deep in their Raphaels and Andrea del Sartos, and so forth. Reggie stood it for ten minutes or so; then he rose and yawned. Fra Filippo Lippi had almost choked him off: but Pacchiarotto finished him. He wasn't going to stop and hear any more of this rot. He longed for something sensible. He'd go out and see what the evening papers said of the favourite for the Two Thousand.

But Kathleen called him back anxiously. 'Where are you going to, Reggie?' she asked, with unexpected affection. It wasn't often she seemed so eager for the pleasure of his society.

'Oh, just strolling out for a bit,' her brother answered evasively, 'till the Mums comes back. I thought you and Mortimer seemed to be hitting it off on high art very well together.'

'Don't go just yet,' his sister put in, with a quick look at him. 'I'm sure mother 'd be vexed if you went away without seeing her.'

'I meant to come back soon,' Reggie responded with a sigh, his right hand still fingering the knob of the door. 'I expect you won't miss me.'

'Oh, don't let him stay on *my* account,' Mortimer echoed with polite anxiety, giving Kathleen a pleading look half aside in his turn. It was clear from that look he wanted a *tête-à-tête* with her.

But Kathleen was inexorable. 'I'd rather you stopped, Reggie,' she said in such a decided voice that even Reggie understood, and made up his mind to give way to her. 'Mother 'll be here before long, and I *want* you to wait for her.'

Reggie sat down with a bump.

'Oh, as you will,' he answered, dropping back into his easy-chair. 'I'm sure *I* don't mind. It's all the same to me. Only, I thought you two could run this Fra Angelico business just about as well without me, don't you know, as with me. I don't pretend to excite myself over Fra Angelico, any way.'

So for the next half-hour poor Rufus Mortimer sat on, still discussing art—which is a capital subject, no doubt, when you want to talk of it, but which palls a little, it must be confessed, if it intervenes incontinently at the exact moment of time when you're waiting to ask the young woman of your choice whether or not she'll have you. Rufus Mortimer, for his part, was rather inclined, as things stood, to put his money on the *not*. For if that delightful English girl had really wanted him, surely she would have managed to get rid, by hook or by crook, of her superfluous brother. Instead of which, she had positively encouraged him in remaining. Which things being so, Rufus Mortimer was more than half disposed to think she desired to avoid having to give him an answer. For that he was really and truly sorry; for he had always liked her very much; and now that she showed some disposition to refuse him, why, he came exceedingly near to loving her. Such is the way of man! The fact that Kathleen Hesslegrave seemed to hold him at arm's-length made Rufus Mortimer resolve in his own mind at all hazards to marry her.

After Mrs. Hesslegrave had returned for a few minutes, somewhat later, the young man rose to go. It was no use waiting now; Kathleen was fenced in, as it were, by a double thorn hedge of mother and brother. Yet he paused by the open door, and held

Kathleen's hand for a second in his own as he said good-bye.

'Then we shall meet in Venice,' he said at last, regretfully. 'In Venice; in October.'

Kathleen looked at him with some concern.

'But you would do better to be in Paris,' she said low. 'It's so much more important for your art, you know!' And she trembled slightly.

'No,' the American answered, brightening up at that little spark of seeming interest in his private pursuits. 'It shall be Venice, Miss Hesslegrave. I make it Venice.' Then he paused for a second, as if afraid of going too far. 'There are things,' he said, gazing wistfully at her with his big brown eyes, 'much more important in one's life than art! So Venice it shall be! Let me meet you in Venice!'

As soon as he was gone, Reggie turned to her with a sniggle.

'That chap's awfully gone on you, Kitty,' he said, much amused. 'He's awfully gone on you. For my part, I never can understand any fellow being gone on such a girl as you; but he's awfully gone on you. Why wouldn't you let me go out? Didn't you see he was just dying to have ten minutes alone with you?'

'Yes, I did see,' Kathleen answered; 'and that was exactly why I didn't want you to go out that moment. I didn't wish to be left alone with him.'

Reggie opened his eyes wide.

'He's a jolly good match,' he continued. 'And a decent enough sort of fellow too—though he knows nothing of horses. I'm sure I don't see why you should make such bones about accepting him!'

'I quite agree with Reggie,' put in Mrs. Hesslegrave,

who had entered. 'He's an excellent young man. I'm surprised at what you say of him.'

Kathleen rose from her seat like one who doesn't care to continue a discussion.

'He's a very good fellow,' she said, with one hand on the door: 'and I like him immensely. So much that—I didn't care to be left alone with him this evening.'

And with that enigmatical remark she slipped away from the room and ran quietly upstairs to complete her packing.

CHAPTER V.

A CHANCE ENCOUNTER.

'October in Venice is always charming,' Rufus Mortimer remarked, as he leaned back luxuriously on the padded seat of his own private gondola, the *Cristoforo Colombo*. 'The summer's too hot here, and the winter's too chilly; but October and April are perfect poems. I'm so glad I made up my mind to come, after all. I never saw Venice before to such absolute advantage.'

Mrs. Hesslegrave gathered her light wrap round her ample shoulders, and settled herself down on the best back bench with an air of unalloyed and complete enjoyment. She was thoroughly in her element. 'There's nothing more delightful than a gondola to travel in,' she said with placid contentment in her full round face, looking up at the two sturdy gondoliers in gay costumes, who handled the paddles at prow and stern with true Venetian mastery of the art and craft of the lagoons. She would have said, if she had been

quite candid, 'Nothing more delightful than a *private* [illegible] that last touch indeed that made up to Mrs. Hesslegrave half the pleasure of the situation. It flattered her vanity, her sense of superiority to the vulgar herd. She hated to hire a mere ordinary hack-boat at the steps by the Molo; to entrust herself to the hands of a possibly extortionate and certainly ill-dressed boatman, and to be lost in the common ruck of plain tourist humanity. But what her soul just loved was to glide like this along the Grand Canal in a private craft, with two gentlemen's servants in full Venetian costume—red sash and black jerkin—by the iron bow; to know herself the admired of all beholders, who really couldn't tell at a casual glance whether she was or was not the proprietor in person of the whole turn-out, the eminently respectable family equipage. I don't know why, but we must all admit there is certainly a sense of extreme luxury and aristocratic exclusiveness about a private gondola, as about the family state-barge of the seventeenth-century nobleman, which is wholly wanting to even the most costly of modern carriages and beliveried footmen. Mrs. Hesslegrave felt as much—and was happy accordingly; for nothing gave her mind such pure enjoyment as the feeling, quite hateful to not a few among us, that she was enjoying something which all the world could not equally enjoy, and was giving rise to passing qualms of envy, hatred, malice, and all uncharitableness in the ill-balanced minds of casual spectators.

So she glided in placid enjoyment down the Grand Canal, drinking it all in as she went with receptive eyes, and noting, by the mute evidence of blinds and shutters, which families were now back in their stately palazzos from their summer holidays, and which were

still drinking 'the gross mud-honey of town' in London or Paris, Berlin or Vienna.

'There's the Contarini-Fasan,' Kathleen cried in delight as they passed in front of one delicious little palace with mouldering pointed Venetian arches of the fourteenth century. 'How lovely it always looks! That exquisite moulding! That rich work round the windows! And those romantic balconies!—I wonder, Mr. Mortimer, you didn't try to rent some old place like that, instead of the one you've got. It's so much more picturesque, you know!'

'Do you think so?' the young American answered, looking quite pleased for a second that she should make the suggestion. 'Well, you see, I didn't know you'd prefer a medieval one. And the Renaissance are certainly more convenient to live in.'

'Why, my dear child,' Mrs. Hesslegrave interposed, with quite a shocked expression, 'what on earth could be more lovely than Mr. Mortimer's palazzo? It's *much* the largest and most important-looking house (except, of course, the Prefecture and the foreign ambassadors') on the Grand Canal. I don't see, myself, how in the world you can find fault with it.'

'Miss Hesslegrave's quite right,' the American answered quickly, with grave politeness, darting a glance at Kathleen. 'Of course, in point of beauty, there can be no comparison between a palazzo like mine, all plain round windows or Renaissance doors, and such crystallized dreams in lace-like stone as the Cà d'Oro or the Palazzo Pisani. One capital of their columns is worth my whole courtyard. It's for those alone we come to live in Venice. But then, they're not always in the market, don't you see; and besides, in many ways they're less convenient to live in. One

must think of that sometimes. The picturesque is all very well as an object of abstract contemplation in life; but when it comes to daily needs, we somehow seem to prefer the sanitary and the comfortable.'

'Oh, and what an exquisite glimpse up the side-canal there!' Kathleen exclaimed once more, with a lingering accent on the words, as they passed just in front of an old red tower with bells hung in its arch-ways. 'That's the campanile of San Vitale, that tower. I always love it: it's a beautiful bit. These quaint out-of-the-way places, that nobody else ever paints, I love the best of all in Venice. They're so much more beautiful and picturesque, after all, than the common things all the world admires, and one sees everywhere—the Rialto, and the Bridge of Sighs, and Santa Maria della Salute.'

'The Macdougalls are back, I see,' Mrs. Hesslegrave interposed with a glance at a first-floor. 'That's their house, Mr. Mortimer. They're charming people, and immensely wealthy. That big red place there, just round by the Layards'.'

'And what lovely old windows it has!' Kathleen exclaimed, glancing up. 'Those deep-recessed quatre-foils! How exquisite they look, with the canary-creeper climbing up the great stone mullions to the tracery of the arches! Don't you love the blue posts they moor their boats to?'

'I wonder if they've begun their Friday afternoons yet,' Mrs. Hesslegrave went on, following out the track of her own reflections. 'We must look and see, Kathleen, when we go back to our lodgings.'

'There was a whole heap of cards, mother,' Kathleen replied, watching the curl of the water from the paddle's edge. 'I didn't much look at them; but I

stuck them all in the yellow Cantagalli pot on the table by the landing. For my part, I just hate these *banal* gaieties in Venice. They interfere so much with one's time and one's painting.'

'Ah, yes, poor Kathleen!' Mrs. Hesslegrave murmured pathetically. 'It's so hard on her, Mr. Mortimer. I'm sure you pity her. She has to work like a slave! She grudges all the time she gives up every week to the natural sports and tastes of her age and her position in society. It's so different with *you*, of course. You have only to paint just when and where you like. Yours is art for art's sake. Poor Kathleen feels compelled to stick at it for a livelihood.'

'But I *like* it, mother,' Kathleen cried, colouring up to her very ears. 'I love my art. I'd much rather be out painting on one of these lovely, solitary side-canals than cooped up in a drawing-room talking silly small-talk to a whole lot of stupid people I don't care a pin about.'

Mrs. Hesslegrave sighed, and shook her head faintly, with a speaking glance beneath her eyelids at Mortimer. (She was under the impression that she was 'drawing him on' by the pathetic channel.)

'It's so sweet of you to say so, dear,' she murmured half aside. 'You want to reassure me. That's charming and sweet of you. And I *know* you like it. In your way you like it. It's a dispensation, of course. Things are always so ordered. What's that lovely text about "tempering the wind to the shorn lamb"? I'm sure it applies to you. I invariably think so in church when I hear it.' For Mrs. Hesslegrave was not the first to attribute to Holy Scripture that sentimental and eminently untrustworthy saying,

which belongs by right to the author of 'Tristram Shandy.'

Just at that moment, however, as they turned with a dexterous twirl under a low bridge up the silent little water-way that leads through quaint lanes to the church of the Frari, they were startled by a sudden voice crying out from close by in clear English tones: 'Hullo, Mortimer! There you are! So you're back again in Venice!'

The speaker was *not* in a gondola, whether private or otherwise; and his costume was so unaffectedly and frankly sailor-like, as of the common mariner, that Mrs. Hesslegrave was at first sight inclined to resent his speaking in so familiar a tone of voice to the occupants of a distinguished and trimly-kept craft like the *Cristoforo Colombo*. But his accent was a gentleman's; and Mrs. Hesslegrave reflected, just in time to prevent her from too overtly displaying her hostile feelings, that nowadays young men of the very best families so often dress just like common sailors when they're out on a yachting cruise. No doubt this eccentric person in the jersey and cap who called out so easily to their host as 'Mortimer,' must be one of these; otherwise, he would surely have known his place better than to shout aloud in that unseemly hail-fellow-well-met way to the occupants of a handsome private gondola.

But Rufus Mortimer looked up at him with a quick glance of recognition. 'Hullo, Willoughby,' he cried, waving his hand to the gondoliers to draw near the bank. 'So you're back again, too! This is better than I expected. I was more than half afraid we shouldn't see you at all at the old perch this winter.'

And even as Mrs. Hesslegrave looked up and won-

dered—oh, miracle of Fate!—Kathleen rose from her seat and leant over the edge of the gondola with one hand outstretched in quite kindly recognition towards the sailor-looking stranger.

'Why, it's you, Mr. Willoughby,' she cried with clear welcome in her voice. 'I *am* so glad to see you in Venice!'

Arnold Willoughby held out his hand in return with a slight tremor of pleased surprise at this unwonted reception.

'Then you haven't forgotten me?' he exclaimed with unaffected pleasure. 'I didn't think, Miss Hesslegrave, you'd be likely to remember me.'

Kathleen turned towards her mother, whose eyes were now fixed upon her in the mutely interrogative fashion of a prudent mamma when her daughter recognises an uncertified stranger.

'This is the gentleman I told you about, dear,' she said simply, presenting him. 'The gentleman who was so good to me that Taking-away Day at the Academy this spring. Don't you remember, I mentioned him?'

Mrs. Hesslegrave froze visibly. This was really too much. She drew herself up as stiff and straight as one can easily manage in a wobbling gondola. 'I have some dim recollection,' she said with slow accents in her chilliest tone, 'that you spoke to me of some gentleman you didn't know who was kind enough to help you in carrying back your picture. I—I'm de-lighted to meet him.' But the tone in which Mrs. Hesslegrave said that word 'de-lighted' belied its significance.

'Step into the gondola, Willoughby,' the young American suggested with the easy friendliness of his countrymen. 'Are you going anywhere in particular?

—No? Just lounging about reconnoitring the ground for the winter's campaign? Then you'd better jump in and let's hear what you've been up to.'

Arnold Willoughby, nothing loath, descended lightly into the gondola. As he entered Mrs. Hesslegrave drew her gown just a little on one side instinctively. She had a sort of feeling in her soul that this maritime-looking young man didn't move in exactly the same exalted sphere as that to which she and hers had always been accustomed. He hadn't at all the air of a cavalry officer; and to Mrs. Hesslegrave's mind your cavalry officer was the measure of all things. So she shrank from him unobtrusively. But Kathleen noticed the shrinking, and being half afraid the nice sailor-like painter might have noticed it too, she was even more polite to him than she might otherwise have been in consequence of her mother's unspoken slight.

Willoughby took a place in the stern, on the comfortable stuffed seat between Mortimer and Kathleen. His manners at least, Mrs. Hesslegrave observed with comparative pleasure, were those of a gentleman; though his tailor's bill would certainly not have suited her son Reginald's enlightened views on that important subject.

'Well, tell us all about it,' Mortimer began at once, with the utmost cordiality. 'You're here, we all see. How have you managed to come here? It was only yesterday I was telling Miss Hesslegrave at the station how you weren't sure whether things would turn out so as to enable you to return; and she said she so much hoped you'd manage to come back again.'

'We should be painting so near one another this year, no doubt,' Kathleen said with a pleasant smile,

'we'd be able to see something of one another's work and one another's society.'

Arnold Willoughby's face flushed with genuine and unexpected pleasure. Could it be really the fact that this pretty and pleasant-mannered artist girl was genuinely glad he had come back to Venice? And he a poor painter with only his art to bless himself with? To Arnold Willoughby, after his rude awakening to fuller experience of the ways and habits of men and women, such disinterested interest seemed well-nigh incredible. He glanced at her timidly, yet with a face full of pleasure.

'That was very, very kind of you,' he answered, rather low, for kindness always overcame him. Then he turned to the American. 'Well, it was like this, you see, Mortimer,' he said; 'I sold my picture.'

'Not the Chioggia Fisher-boats?' Kathleen cried, quite interested.

'Yes, the same you saw that day I met you at the Academy,' Arnold answered, with secret delight that the pretty girl should have remembered the name and subject of his maiden effort.

'I thought you'd sell it,' Kathleen replied, really radiant. 'I *am* so glad you did. Mr. Mortimer told me your return to Venice and your future in art very largely depended upon your chance of selling it.'

'Kathleen, my dear,' Mrs. Hesslegrave interposed in her chilliest voice, 'do take care what you do. Don't you see you're letting your shawl hang over into the water?'

Kathleen lifted it up hurriedly, and went on with her conversation, unheeding her mother's hint, which indeed fell flat upon her.

'I knew you'd sell it,' she continued with girlish

enthusiasm. 'It *was* so good. I liked it immensely. Such rich colour on the sails; and such delicate imagination!'

'But it rather lacked technique,' the American interposed, just a trifle chillily.

'Oh, technique anybody can get nowadays,' Kathleen answered with warmth—'if he goes to the right place for it. It's a matter of paying. What he can't buy or be taught is imagination—fancy—keen sense of form—poetical colour-perception.'

'And how much did they give you for it?' the American asked, point-blank, with his country's directness. (An Englishman would have said, 'I hope the terms were satisfactory.')

Willoughby parried the question.

'Not much,' he answered discreetly. 'But enough for my needs. I felt at least my time had not been wasted. It's enabled me to come back this autumn to Venice, which on many grounds I greatly desired to do; and it will even allow me to get a little more instruction in that technique of art which you rightly say is the weak point of my position. So, of course, on the whole, I'm more than satisfied.'

'And what have you been doing all summer?' Mortimer continued, with a lazy wave to the gondolier, leaning back at his ease on his padded cushions.

Arnold Willoughby still retained too much of the innate self-confidence of the born aristocrat to think it necessary for him to conceal anything that seemed to himself sufficiently good for *him* to do. If he could *do* it, he could also acknowledge it.

'Oh, I just went to sea again,' he answered frankly. 'I got a place as A.B. on a Norwegian ship that traded with Dieppe; deal planks and so forth; and the hard

work and fresh air I got in the North Sea have done me good, I fancy. I'm ever so much stronger than I was last winter.'

Mrs. Hesslegrave had been longing for some time to interpose in this very curious and doubtful conversation; and now she could restrain her desire no longer.

'You do it for your health, then, I suppose?' she ventured to suggest, as if on purpose to save her own self-respect and the credit of Rufus Mortimer's society. 'You've been ordered it by the doctor?'

'Oh, dear no! I do it for my livelihood,' Arnold Willoughby answered stoutly, not in the least ashamed. 'I'm a sailor by trade; I go to sea all summer, and I paint all winter. It's a very good alternation. I find it suits me.'

This was too much for Mrs. Hesslegrave. She felt that Mortimer, though he had a perfect right, of course, to choose his own friends where he liked, ought not to have exposed dear Kathleen and herself to the contagion, so to speak, of such strange acquaintances.

'Dear me!' she cried suddenly, looking up at the big brick tower that rose sheer just in front of them: 'here we are at the Frari!—Kathleen, didn't you say you wanted to go in and look again at that picture of What's-his-name's—Ah, yes, Tintoretto's—in the Scuola di San Rocco?—Oh, thank you so much, Mr. Mortimer; we won't trouble you to wait for us. Kathleen knows her way on foot all over Venice. She can get from place to place in the most wonderful fashion, from end to end of the town, by these funny little *calli*. It *was* so kind of you to give us a lift so far.—Here, Kathleen; step out! Good-morning, Mr. Mortimer;

your gondola's just charming.—Good-morning, Mr.—ah—I forget your friend's name; oh, of course: Mr. Willoughby.'

The inevitable old man with a boat-hook was holding the gondola by this time to the bank, and extending his hat for the expected penny. Mrs. Hesslegrave stepped out, with her most matronly air, looking a dignified Juno. Kathleen stepped after her on to the slippery stone pavement, green-grown by the water's edge. As she did so, she turned, with her sweet slight figure, and waved a friendly good-bye to the two painters, the rich and the poor impartially.

'And I hope, Mr. Mortimer,' she called out in her cheeriest tone, 'you'll bring Mr. Willoughby with you next week to our usual tea-and-talk at four on Wednesday.'

As for poor Mrs. Hesslegrave, she stood speechless for a second, dumfounded with dismay, on the stone steps of the Frari. What could Kathleen be thinking of? That dreadful man! And this was the very misfortune she had been bent on averting!

CHAPTER VI.

A CASE OF CONSCIENCE.

But the cup of Mrs. Hesslegrave's humiliation was not yet full. A moment's pause lost all—and lo! the floodgates of an undesirable acquaintance were opened upon her.

It was charity that did it—pure feminine charity, not unmingled with a faint sense of how *noblesse oblige*, and what dignity demands from a potential Lady

Bountiful. For the inevitable old man, with a ramshackled boat-hook in his wrinkled brown hand, and no teeth to boast of, who invariably moors your gondola to the shore while you alight from the prow, and holds his hat out afterwards for a few loose *soldi*, bowed low to the ground in his picturesque rags as Mrs. Hesslegrave passed him. Now, proper respect for her superior position always counted for much with Mrs. Hesslegrave. She paused for a moment at the top of the mouldering steps in helpless search for an elusive pocket. But the wisdom and foresight of her London dressmaker had provided for this contingency well beforehand by concealing it so far back among the recesses of her gown that she fumbled in vain and found no *soldi*. In her difficulty she turned with an appealing glance to Kathleen.

'Have you got any coppers, dear?' she inquired in her most mellifluous voice. And Kathleen forthwith proceeded in like manner to prosecute her search for them in the labyrinthine folds of her own deftly-screened pocket.

On what small twists and turns of circumstance does our whole life hang! Kathleen's fate hinged entirely on that momentary delay, coupled with the equally accidental meeting at the doors of the Academy. For while she paused and hunted, as the old man stood bowing and scraping by the water's edge, and considering to himself, with his obsequious smile, that after so long a search the *forestieri* couldn't decently produce in the end any smaller coin than half a *lira*—Rufus Mortimer, perceiving the cause of their indecision, stepped forward in the gondola with his own purse open. At the very same instant, too, Arnold Willoughby, half-forgetful of his altered fortunes, and

conscious only of the fact that the incident was discomposing at the second for a lady, pulled out loose his scanty stock of available cash, and selected from it the smallest silver coin he happened to possess, which chanced to be a piece of fifty *centesimi*. Then, while Mortimer was hunting among his gold to find a franc, Arnold handed the money hastily to the cringing old bystander. The man in the picturesque rags closed his wrinkled brown hand on it with a satisfied grin; and Mortimer tried to find another half-franc among the folds of his purse to repay on the spot his sailor acquaintance. But Arnold answered with such a firm air of quiet dignity, 'No, thank you; allow me to settle it,' that Mortimer, after a moment of ineffectual remonstrance—'But this is my gondola'—was fain to hold his peace; and even Mrs. Hesslegrave was constrained to acquiesce in the odd young man's whim with a murmured, 'Oh, thank you.' After that, she felt she could no longer be frigid—till the next opportunity. Meanwhile, when Kathleen suggested in her gentlest and most enticing voice, 'Why don't you two step out and look at the Tintorettos with us?'—Mrs. Hesslegrave recognised that there was nothing for it now but to smile and look pleased and pretend she really liked the strange young man's society.

So they went into the Scuola di San Rocco together. But Rufus Mortimer, laudably anxious that his friend should expend no more of his hard-earned cash on such unseasonable gallantries, took good care to go on a few paces ahead and take tickets for the whole party before Mrs. Hesslegrave and Kathleen, escorted by the unsuspecting Arnold, had turned the corner by the rearing red church of the Frari. The elder lady arrived at the [illegible]oated front of the Scuola not a

little out of breath; for she was endowed with asthma, and she hated to walk even the few short steps from the gondola to the tiny piazza; which was one of the reasons, indeed, why Kathleen, most patient and dutiful and considerate of daughters, had chosen Venice rather than any other Italian town as the scene on which to specialize her artistic talent. For nowhere on earth is locomotion so cheap or so easy as in the city of canals, where a gondola will convey you from end to end of the town, without noise or jolting, at the modest expense of eightpence sterling. Even Mrs. Hesslegrave, however, could not resist after a while the contagious kindliness of Arnold Willoughby's demeanour. 'Twas such a novelty to him to be in ladies' society nowadays, that he rose at once to the occasion, and developed at one bound from a confirmed misogynist into an accomplished courtier. The fact of it was he had been taken by Kathleen's frank gratitude that day at the Academy; and he was really touched this afternoon by her evident recollection of him, and her anxiety to show him all the politeness in her power. Never before since he had practically ceased to be Earl of Axminster had any woman treated him with half so much consideration. Arnold Willoughby was almost tempted in his own heart to try whether or not he had hit here, by pure accident of fate, upon that rare soul which could accept him and love him for the true gold that was in him, and not for the guinea stamp of which he had purposely divested himself.

As they entered the great hall, Campagna's masterpiece, its walls richly dight with Tintoretto's frescoes, Arnold Willoughby drew back involuntarily at the first glance with a little start of astonishment.

'Dear me,' he cried, turning round in his surprise to Kathleen, and twisting his left hand in a lock of hair behind his ear—which was a trick he had whenever he was deeply interested—'what amazing people these superb old Venetians were, after all! Why, one's never at the end of them! What a picture it gives one of their magnificence and their wealth, this sumptuous council-house of one unimportant brotherhood!'

'It is fine,' Mortimer interposed, with a little smile of superiority, as one who knew it well of old. 'It's a marvel of decoration. Then, I suppose, from what you say, this is the first time you've been here?'

'Yes, the very first time,' Arnold admitted at once with that perfect frankness which was his most charming characteristic. 'Though I've lived here so long, there are in Venice a great many interiors I've never seen. Outside, I think I know every nook and corner of the smallest side-canals, and the remotest *calli*, about as well as anybody; for I'm given to meandering on foot round the town; and it's only on foot one can ever really get to know the whole of Venice. Perhaps you wouldn't believe it, but there isn't a single house on all the islands that make up the town which can't be reached on one's own legs from every other by some circuit of bridges, without one's ever having to trust to a ferry-boat or a gondola. But of course you must know the tortuous twists and turns to get round to some of them. So, outside at least, I know my Venice thoroughly. But inside—ah, there! if you except St. Mark's and a few other churches—with, of course, the Academy—I hardly know it at all. There are dozens of places you could take me to like this that I never stepped inside yet.'

Kathleen was just going to ask, 'Why?' when the answer came of itself to her. In order to gain admittance to most of these interiors, you have to pay a franc; and she remembered now, with a sudden burst of surprise, that a franc was a very appreciable sum indeed to their new acquaintance. So she altered her phrase to:

'Well, I'm very glad at least we met you to-day, and have had the pleasure of bringing you for the first time to San Rocco.'

And it *was* a treat. Arnold couldn't deny that. He roamed round those great rooms in a fever of delight, and gazed with the fulness of a painter's soul at Tintoretto's masterpieces. The gorgeous brilliancy of Titian's Annunciation, the naturalistic reality of the Adoration of the Magi, the beautiful penitent Magdalene beside the fiery cloud-flakes of her twilight landscape—he gloated over them all with cultivated appreciation. Kathleen marvelled to herself how a mere common sailor could ever have imbibed such an enthralling love for the highest art, and still more how he could ever have learned to speak of its inner meaning in such well-chosen phrases. It fairly took her breath away when the young man in the jersey and blue woollen cap stood entranced before the fresco of the Pool of Bethesda, with its grand far-away landscape, and mused to himself aloud as it were:

'What a careless giant he was, to be sure, this Tintoretto! Why, he seems just to fling his paint haphazard upon the wall, as if it cost him no more trouble to paint an Ascension than to sprawl his brush over the face of the plaster: and yet—there comes out in the end a dream of soft colour, a poem in neutral tints, a triumphant pæan of virile imagining.'

'Yes! they're beautiful,' Kathleen answered: 'exceedingly beautiful. And what you say of them is so true. They're dashed off with such princely ease. You put into words what one would like to say one's self, but doesn't know how to.'

And, indeed, even Mrs. Hesslegrave was forced to admit in her own mind that, in spite of his rough clothes and his weather-beaten face, the young man seemed to have ideas and language above his station. Not that Mrs. Hesslegrave thought any the better of him on that account. Why can't young men be content to remain in the rank in life in which circumstances and the law of the land have placed them? Of course there were Burns, and Shakespeare, and Keats, and so forth—not one of them a born gentleman: and Kathleen was always telling her how that famous Giotto (whose angular angels she really couldn't with honesty pretend to admire) was at first nothing more than a mere Tuscan shepherd boy. But, then, all these were geniuses; and if a man is a genius, of course that's quite another matter. Though, to be sure, in our own day, genius has no right to crop up in a common sailor. It discomposes one's natural views of life, and leads to such unpleasant and awkward positions.

When they had looked at the Tintorettos through the whole history of the Testament, from the Annunciation downstairs with the child-like Madonna to the Ascension in the large hall on the upper landing, they turned to go out and resume their places in the waiting gondola. And here a new misfortune lay in wait for Mrs. Hesslegrave. 'Twas a day of evil chances. For as she and Rufus Mortimer took their seats in the stern on those neatly-padded cushions which rejoiced her soul, Kathleen, to her immense surprise and

no small internal annoyance, abruptly announced her intention of walking home over the bridge by herself, so as to pass the colour-shop in the Calle San Moïse. She wanted some ultramarine, she said, for the picture she was going to paint in the corner of the Giudecca. Of course, Arnold Willoughby insisted upon accompanying her; and so, to complete that morning's mishaps, Mrs. Hesslegrave had the misery of seeing her daughter walk off, through a narrow and darkling Venetian street, accompanied on her way by that awful man, whom Mrs. Hesslegrave had been doing all she knew to shake off from the very first moment she had the ill-luck to set eyes on him.

Not that Kathleen had the slightest intention of disobeying or irritating or annoying her mother. Nothing, indeed, could have been further from her innocent mind; it was merely that she didn't understand or suspect Mrs. Hesslegrave's objection to the frank young sailor. Too honest to doubt him, she missed the whole point of her mother's dark hints. So she walked home with Arnold, conscience free, without the faintest idea she was doing anything that could possibly displease Mrs. Hesslegrave. They walked on, side by side, through strange little lanes, bounded high on either hand by lofty old palaces, which raised their mildewed fronts and antique arched windows above one another's heads, in emulous striving towards the scanty sunshine. As for Arnold Willoughby, he darted round the corners like one that knew them intimately. Kathleen had flattered her soul she could find her way tolerably well on foot through the best part of Venice: but she soon discovered that Arnold Willoughby knew how to thread his path through that seeming labyrinth far more

easily than she could do. Here and there he would cross some narrow high-pitched bridge over a petty canal, where market-boats from the mainland stood delivering vegetables at gloomy portals that opened close down to the water's edge, or woodmen from the hills, with heavily-laden barges, handed fagots through grated windows to bare-headed and yellow-haired Venetian housewives. Ragged shutters and iron balconies overhung the green waterway. Then, again, he would skirt for awhile some ill-scented Rio, where strings of onions hung out in the sun from every second door, and cheap Madonnas in gilt and painted wood sat enshrined in plaster niches behind burning oil-lamps. On and on he led Kathleen by unknown side-streets, past wonderful little squares or flag-paved *campi*, each adorned with its ancient church and its slender belfry; over the colossal curve of the Rialto with its glittering shops on either side; and home by queer byways, where few feet else save of native Venetians ever ventured to penetrate. Now and again round the corners came the echoing cries, '*Stali*,' '*Premè*' and some romantic gondola with its covered trappings, like a floating black hearse, would glide past like lightning. Well as Kathleen knew the town, it was still a revelation to her. She walked on, entranced, with a painter's eye, through that ever-varying, ever-moving, ever-enchanting panorama.

And they talked as they went; the young sailor-painter talked on and on, frankly, delightfully, charmingly. He talked of Kathleen and her art; of what she would work at this winter; of where he himself meant to pitch his easel; of the chances of their both choosing some neighbouring subject. Confidence begets confidence. He talked so much about Kathleen,

and drew her on so about her aims and aspirations in art, that Kathleen in turn felt compelled for very shame to repay the compliment, and to ask him much about himself and his mode of working. Arnold Willoughby smiled and showed those exquisite teeth of his when she questioned him first. 'It's the one subject,' he answered—'self—on which they say all men are fluent and none agreeable.' But he belied his own epigram, Kathleen thought, as he continued: for he talked about himself, and yet he talked delightfully. It was so novel to hear a man so discuss the question of his own place in life, as though it mattered little whether he remained a common sailor or rose to be reckoned a painter and a gentleman. He never even seemed to feel the immense gulf which in Kathleen's eyes separated the two callings. It appeared to be to him a mere matter of convenience which of the two he followed. He talked of them so calmly as alternative trades in the pursuit of which a man might if he chose earn an honest livelihood.

'But surely you feel the artist's desire to create beautiful things?' Kathleen cried at last. 'They're not quite on the same level with you—fine art and sail-reefing!'

That curious restrained curl was just visible for a second round the delicate corners of Arnold Willoughby's honest mouth.

'You compel me to speak of myself,' he said, 'when I would much rather be speaking of somebody or something else; but if I must, I will tell you.'

'Do,' Kathleen said, drawing close, with more eagerness in her manner than Mrs. Hesslegrave would have considered entirely ladylike. 'It's so much

more interesting.' And then, fearing she had perhaps gone a little too far, she blushed to her ear-tips.

Arnold noticed that dainty blush—it became her wonderfully—and was confirmed by it in his good opinion of Kathleen's disinterestedness. Could this indeed be the one woman on earth to whom he could really give himself?—the one woman who could take a man for what he was in himself, not for what the outside world chose to call him? He was half inclined to think so.

'Well,' he continued with a reflective air, 'there's much to be said for art—and much also for the common sailor. I may be right, or I may be wrong; I don't want to force anybody else into swallowing my opinions wholesale; I'm far too uncertain about them myself for that; but as far as my own conduct goes (which is all I have to answer for), why, I must base it upon them; I must act as seems most just and right to my own conscience. Now, I feel a sailor's life is one of undoubted usefulness to the community. He's employed in carrying commodities of universally acknowledged value from the places where they're produced to the places where they're needed. Nobody can deny that that's a useful function. The man who does that can justify his life and his livelihood to his fellows. No caviller can ever accuse him of eating his bread unearned, an idle drone, at the table of the commonalty. That's why I determined to be a common sailor. It was work I could do; work that suited me well; work I felt my conscience could wholly approve of.'

'I see,' Kathleen answered, very much taken aback. It had never even occurred to her that a man could so choose his calling in life on conscientious rather than

on personal grounds; could attach more importance to the usefulness and lawfulness of the trade he took up than to the money to be made at it. The earnest-looking sailor-man in the rough woollen clothes was opening up to her new perspectives of moral possibility.

'But didn't you long for art too?' she went on after a brief pause; 'you who have so distinct a natural vocation, so keen a taste for form and colour?'

Arnold Willoughby looked hard at her.

'Yes,' he answered frankly, with a scrutinizing glance. 'I did. I longed for it. But at first I kept the longing sternly down. I thought it was wrong of me even to wish to indulge it. I had put my hand to the plough, and I didn't like to look back again. Still, when my health began to give way, I saw things somewhat differently. I was as anxious as ever, then, to do some work in the world that should justify my existence, so to speak, to my fellow-creatures; anxious to feel I didn't sit, a mere idle mouth, at the banquet of humanity. But I began to perceive that man cannot live by bread alone; that the useful trades, though they are, after all, at bottom the noblest and most ennobling, do not fill up the sum of human existence: that we have need, too, of books, of poetry, of pictures, statues, music. So I determined to give up my life, half-and-half, to either—to sail by summer, and paint by winter, if only I could earn enough by painting to live upon. For my first moral postulate is that every man ought to be ashamed of himself if he *can't* win wage enough by his own exertions to keep him *going*. That is, in fact, the one solid and practical test of his usefulness to his fellow-creatures—whether or not they are willing to pay him that he may keep

at work for them. If he can't do that, then I hold without doubt he is a moral failure. And it's his duty to take himself sternly in hand till he fits himself at once for being the equal in this respect of the navvy or the scavenger.'

'But art drew you on?' Kathleen said, much wondering in her soul at this strange intrusion of conscience into such unfamiliar fields.

'Yes, art drew me on,' Arnold Willoughby answered; 'and though I had my doubts, I allowed it to draw me. I felt I was following my own inclination; but I felt, too, I was doing right to some extent, if only I could justify myself by painting pictures good enough to give pleasure to others: the test of their goodness being always saleability. The fact is, the sea didn't satisfy all the wants of my nature; and since we men are men, not sheep or monkeys, I hold we are justified in indulging to the full these higher and purely human or civilized tastes, just as truly as the lower ones. So I determined, after all, to take to art for half my livelihood—not, I hope, without conscientious justification. For I would never wish to do anything in life which might not pass the honest scrutiny of an impartial jury of moral inquisitors.—Why, here we are at the Piazza! I'd no idea we'd got so far yet!'

'Nor I either!' Kathleen exclaimed. 'I'm sorry for it, Mr. Willoughby—for this is all so interesting.—But, at any rate, you're coming with Mr. Mortimer on Wednesday.'

Arnold Willoughby's face flushed all aglow with pleasure. The misogynist in him was thoroughly overcome; nothing remained but the man chivalrously grateful to a beautiful woman for her undisguised

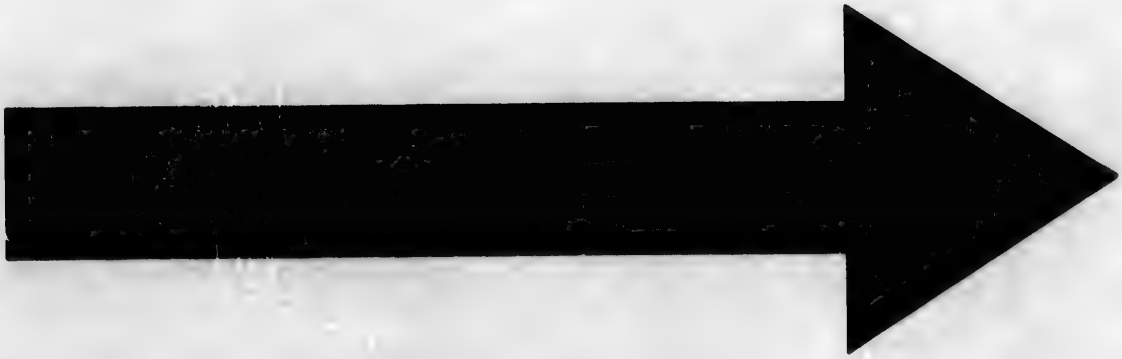
interest. He raised his hat, radiant. 'Thank you so much,' he answered simply, like the gentleman that he was. 'You may be sure I won't forget it. How kind of you to ask me!'

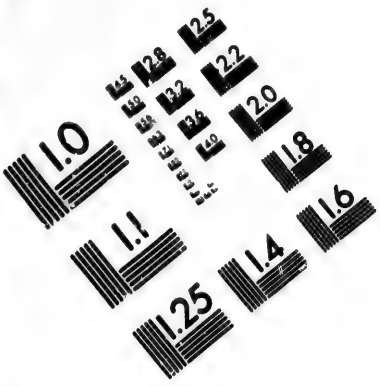
For he knew it was the common sailor in rough clothes she had invited, not Albert Ogilvie Redburn, seventh Earl of Axminster.

CHAPTER VII.

MAKING THEIR MINDS UP.

That winter through, in spite of Mrs. Hesslegrave, Kathleen saw a great deal of the interesting sailor who had taken to painting. Half by accident, half by design, they had chosen their pitches very close together. Both of them were painting on that quaint old quay, the Fondamenta delle Zattere, overlooking the broad inlet or Canal della Giudecca, where most of the sea-going craft of Venice lie at anchor, unloading. Kathleen's canvas was turned inland, towards the crumbling old church of San Trovaso, and the thick group of little bridges, curved high in the middle, that span the minor canals of that half-deserted quarter. She looked obliquely down two of those untrodden streets at once, so as to get a double glimpse of two sets of bridges at all possible angles, and afford herself a difficult lesson in the perspective of arches. Midway between the two rose the tapering campanile of the quaint old church, with the acacias by its side, that hang their drooping branches and feathery foliage into the stagnant water of the placid Rio. But Arnold Willoughby's easel was turned in





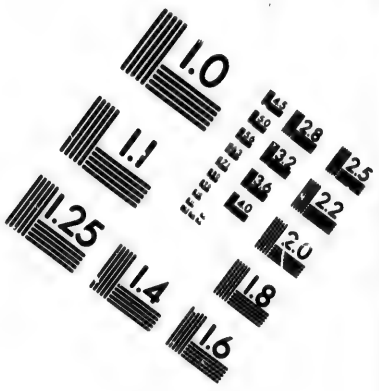
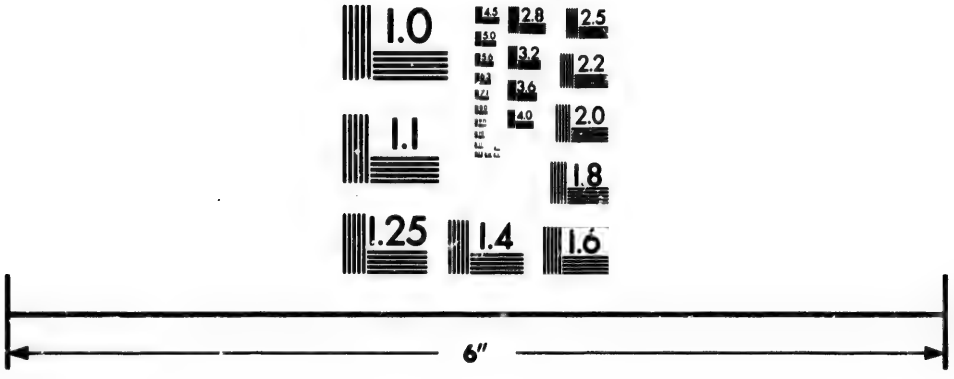


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the opposite direction, towards the seaward runlets and the open channel where the big ships lay moored; he loved better to paint the sea-going vessels he knew and understood so well—the thick forest of masts; the russet-brown sails of the market-boats from Mestre; the bright reds and greens of the Chioggia fisher-craft; the solemn gray of the barges that bring fresh water from Fusina. It was maritime Venice he could best reproduce; while Kathleen's lighter brush reflected rather the varying moods and tessellated floor of the narrow canals, which are to the sea-girt city what streets and alleys are to more solid towns of the mainland.

Thus painting side by side, they saw much of one another. Rufus Mortimer, who cherished a real liking for Kathleen, grew jealous at times of the penniless sailor-man. It seemed to him a pity, indeed, that Kathleen should get entangled with a fellow like that, who could never, by any possibility, be in a position to marry her. But then Mortimer, being an American, had a profound faith at bottom in the persuasive worth of the almighty dollar; and though he was really a good fellow with plenty of humanity and generous feeling, he didn't doubt that in the end, when it came to settling down, Kathleen would prefer the solid advantages of starting in life as a rich Philadelphian's wife to the sentimental idea of love in a cottage—and a poor one at that—with a destitute sailor who dabbled like an amateur in marine painting. However, being a prudent man, and knowing that proximity in these affairs is half the battle, Mortimer determined to pitch his own canvas in the same part of the town, and to paint a picture close by to Kathleen and Willoughby. This involved on his part no small departure from his usual practice; for Mortimer was by choice a confirmed

figure-painter, who worked in a studio from the living model. But he managed to choose an outdoor subject combining figure with landscape, and dashed away vigorously at a background of brown warehouses and mouldering arches, with a laughing group of gay Venetian models picturesquely posed as a merry christening-party, by the big doors of San Trovaso.

Money gives a man a pull; and Arnold Willoughby felt it when every morning Kathleen floated up to her work in Rufus Mortimer's private gondola, with Mrs. Hesslegrave leaning back (in her capacity of chaperon) on those well-padded cushions, and the two handsome gondoliers waiting obsequious and attentive by the marble steps for their employer's orders. But it was just what he wanted. For he could see with his own eyes that Mortimer was paying very marked court to the pretty English girl-artist; and, indeed, Mortimer, after his country's wont, made no attempt to disguise that patent fact in any way. On the other hand, Arnold perceived that Kathleen seemed to pay quite as much attention to the penniless sailor as to the American millionaire. And that was exactly what Arnold Willoughby desired to find out. He could get any number of women to flutter eagerly and anxiously round Lord Axminster's chair; but he would never care to take any one of them all for better, for worse, unless she was ready to give up money and position and more eligible offers for the sake of Arnold Willoughby, the penniless sailor and struggling artist.

And, indeed, in spite of his well-equipped gondola, Rufus Mortimer didn't somehow have things all his own way. If Kathleen came down luxuriously every morning in the *Cristoforo Colombo*, she oftenest returned to the Piazza on foot, by devious byways, with

Arnold Willoughby. She liked those walks ever so much: Mr. Willoughby was always such a delightful companion; and, sailor or no sailor, he had really picked up an astonishing amount of knowledge about Venetian history, antiquities and architecture. On one such day, towards early spring, as they walked together through the narrow lanes, overshadowed by mighty cornices, where one could touch the houses on either hand as one went, a pretty little Italian girl, about five years old, ran hastily out of a musty shop over whose door hung salt fish and long strings of garlic. She was singing to herself as she ran a queer old song in the Venetian dialect—

'Vustu che mi te insegna a navegar?
Vate a far una barca o una batela:'

but when her glance fell on Arnold Willoughby she looked up at him with a merry twinkle in her big brown eyes, and dropped him a little curtsey of the saucy Southern pattern. 'Buon giorno, sior,' she cried, in the liquid Venetian *patois*. And Arnold answered with a pleasant smile of friendly recognition, 'Buon giorno, piccola.'

'You know her?' Kathleen asked, half wondering to herself how her painter had made the acquaintance of the little golden-haired Venetian.

'Oh dear yes,' the young man answered with a smile. 'That's Cecca, that little one. She knows me very well.' He hesitated a moment; then on purpose, as if to try her, he went on very quietly: 'In point of fact, I lodge there.'

Kathleen was conscious of a distinct thrill of surprise, not unmixed with something like horror or disgust. She had grown accustomed by this time to her companion's rough clothes, and to his sailor-like

demeanour, redeemed as it was in her eyes by his artistic feeling, and his courteous manners, which she always felt in her heart were those of a perfect gentleman. But it gave her a little start even now to find that the man who could talk so beautifully about Gentile Bellini and Vittore Carpaccio—the man who taught her to admire and understand for the first time the art of the very earliest Venetian painters; the man who so loved the great Romanesque arcades of the Fondaco dei Turchi, and who gloated over the details of the mosaics in St. Mark's—could consent to live in a petty Italian shop, reeking with salt cod and overhanging the noisome bank of a side-canal more picturesque than sweet-smelling. She showed her consternation in her face; for Arnold, who was watching her close, went on with a slight shadow on his frank sun-burnt forehead: 'Yes, I live in there. I thought you'd think the worse of me when you came to know it.'

Thus openly challenged, Kathleen turned round to him with her fearless eyes, and said perhaps a little more than she would ever have said had he not driven her to avow it.

'Mr. Willoughby,' she answered, gazing straight into his honest face, 'it isn't a pretty place, and I wouldn't like to live in it myself, I confess; but I don't think the worse of you. I respect you so much, I really don't believe anything of that sort—of any sort, perhaps—could ever make me think the worse of you. So there! I've told you.'

'Thank you,' Arnold answered low. And then he was silent. Neither spoke for some moments. Each was thinking: 'Have I said too much?' And Arnold Willoughby was also thinking very seriously in his

own mind: 'Having gone so far, ought I not now to go farther?'

However, being a prudent man, he reflected to himself that if he could hardly pay his own way as yet by his art, he certainly could not pay somebody else's. So he held his tongue for the moment, and went home a little later, to his single room overlooking the side-canal, to ruminate at his leisure over this new face to his circumstances.

And Kathleen, too, went home—to think much about Arnold Willoughby. Both young people, in fact, spent the best part of that day in thinking of nothing else save one another; which was a tolerably good sign to the experienced observer that they were falling in love, whether they knew it or knew it not.

For when Kathleen got home, she shut herself up by herself in her own pretty room with the dainty wall-paper, and leaned out of the window. It was a beautiful window, on the Grand Canal, quite close to the Piazza, and the Doges' Palace, and the Rivi degli Schiavoni; and it looked across the inlet towards the Dogana di Mare, and the dome of Santa Maria, with the campanile of San Giorgio on its lonely mud-island in the middle distance. Beyond lay a spacious field of burnished gold, the shallow water of the lagoon in the full flood of sunshine. But Kathleen had no eyes that lovely afternoon for the creeping ships that glided in and out with stately motion through the tortuous channel which leads between islets of gray slime to the mouth of the Lido and the open sea. Great red lateen sails swerved and luffed unnoticed. All she could think of now was Arnold Willoughby, and his lodgings at the salt-fish shop. Her whole soul was deeply stirred by that strange disclosure.

She might have guessed it before: yet, now she knew it, it frightened her. Was it right of her, she asked herself over and over again, to let herself fall in love, as she felt she was doing, with a common sailor, who could live contentedly in a small Italian *magazen*, inside whose doors she herself would hardly consent to show her face? Was it lady-like? was it womanly of her?

She had her genuine doubts. Few women would have felt otherwise. For to women the conventions count for more than to men; and the feelings of class are more deep-seated and more persistent, especially in all that pertains to love and marriage. A man can readily enough 'marry beneath him'; but to a woman it is a degradation to give herself away to what she thinks an inferior. An inferior? Even as she thought it, Kathleen Hesslegrave's mind revolted with a rush against the base imputation. He was not her inferior; rather, if it came to that, be he sailor or gentleman, he was her superior in every way. The man who could paint, who could think, who could talk as he could, the man who cherished such high ideals of life, of conduct, of duty, was everyone's equal and most people's superior. He was her own superior. In cold blood she said it. He could think and dare and attain to things she herself at her best could but blindly grope after.

In her diary that afternoon (for she had acquired the bad habit of keeping a diary) Kathleen wrote down all these things, as she was wont to write down her inmost thoughts; and she even ended with the direct avowal to herself, 'I love him! I love him! If he asks me, I will accept him.' She locked it up in her safest drawer, but she was not ashamed of it,

At the very same moment, however, Arnold Willoughby for his part was leaning out of his window in turn, in the wee top room of the house above the salt-fish shop in the tiny side-street, with his left hand twisted in the lock behind his ear, after that curious fashion of his, and was thinking—of what else save Kathleen Hesslegrave?

It was a pretty enough window in its way, too, that leaded lattice on the high fourth floor in the Calle del Paradiso; and, as often happens in Venetian side-streets, when you mount high enough in the skyward-clambering houses, it commanded a far more beautiful and extensive view than any stranger could imagine as he looked up from without at the narrow chink of blue between the tall rows of opposite stonework. For it gave upon a side-canal full of life and bustle; and it looked out just beyond upon a quaint round tower with a Romanesque staircase winding spirally outside it, and disclosing glimpses in the further distance of spires and domes and campanili innumerable. But it wasn't of the staircase, or the crowded canal, or the long shallow barges laden with eggs and fruit, that Arnold Willoughby was just then thinking. His mind was wholly taken up with Kathleen Hesslegrave and the new wide problems she laid open before him.

He knew he was in love with her. He recognised he was in love with her. And what was more, from the way she had said those words, 'I respect you so much, I don't believe anything on earth could ever make me think the worse of you,' he felt pretty sure in his own mind she loved him in return, and had divined his love for her. Even his native modesty would not allow him to deceive himself on that score any longer. For he was a modest man, little given to

fancying that women were 'gone on him,' as Mr. Reginald Hesslegrave was wont to phrase it in his peculiar dialect. Indeed, Arnold Willoughby had had ample cause for modesty in that direction; Lady Sark had taught him by bitter experience to know his proper place; and he had never forgotten that one sharp lesson. She was a simple clergyman's daughter near Oxford when first he met her; and he had fallen in love at once with her beauty, her innocence, her seeming simplicity. She rose quickly to an earl. He believed in her with all the depth and sincerity of his honest nature. There was nobody like Blanche, he thought; nobody so true, so simple-minded, so sweet, so trustworthy. A single London season made all the difference. Blanche Middleton found herself the belle of the year; and being introduced to the great world, through Lord Axminster's friends, as his affianced bride, made the best of her opportunities by throwing over one of the poorest earls in England in favour of one of the richest and most worthless marquises. From that moment, the man who had once been Albert Ogilvie Redburn, Earl of Axminster, was never likely to overestimate the immediate effect produced by his mere personality on the heart of any woman.

Nevertheless, Arnold Willoughby was not disinclined to believe that Kathleen Hesslegrave really and truly loved him. Because one woman had gone straight from his arms to another man's bosom, that did not prove that all women were incapable of loving. He believed Kathleen liked him very much, not only for his own sake, but also in spite of prejudices—deeply ingrained prejudices, natural enough under the circumstances, and which almost every good woman (as

good women go) would have shared to the full her. And he began to wonder now whether, having gone so far, it was not his duty to go a step further and ask her to marry him. A man has no right to lead a woman's heart up to a certain point of expectation, and then to draw back without giving her at least the chance of accepting him.

But how could he ask her? That was now the question. He certainly wasn't going to turn his back upon his own deliberate determination, and to claim once more the title and estates of the earldom of Axminster. Having put his hand to the plough, as he so often said to himself, for very shame of his manhood, he must never look back again. One way alone shone clear before him. Every labourer in England could earn enough by his own exertions to support at need a wife and family. Arnold Willoughby would have felt himself a disgraceful failure if he could not succeed in doing what the merest breaker of stones on the road could do. He made up his mind at once. He must manage to earn such a living for himself as would enable him without shame to ask Kathleen whether or not she liked him well enough to share it with him in future.

From that day forth, then, this aim was ever present in Arnold Willoughby's mind. He would succeed in his art, for the sake of asking the one woman on earth he could love to marry him. And oftener and oftener as he paced the streets of Venice, he twisted his finger round the lock by his ear with that curious gesture which was always in his case the surest sign of profound preoccupation.

CHAPTER VIII.

A DIGRESSION.

In London, meanwhile, Mr. Reginald Hesslegrave, to use his own expressive phrase, was 'going it.' And few young gentlemen with an equally exiguous income knew how to 'go it' at the same impetuous pace as Mr. Reginald Hesslegrave. That very same evening, indeed, as he walked down the Strand arm-in-arm with his chum, Charlie Owen—the only other fellow in the office who fulfilled to the letter Mr. Reginald's exalted ideal of 'what a gentleman ought to be'—he stopped for a moment opposite the blushing window of a well-known sporting paper to observe the result of the first big race of the season. Mr. Reginald, as is the wont of his kind, had backed the favourite. He drew a long breath of disappointment as he scanned the telegram giving the result. 'Amber Witch wins in a canter,' he murmured with marked disgust to his sympathizing companion. 'A rank outsider!'

'Pipped again?' Charlie Owen inquired in the peculiar dialect at which they were both experts.

And Reginald Hesslegrave answered:

'Pipped again! For a tenner!' with manly resignation. He was sustained under this misfortune, indeed, by the consoling reflection that the 'tenner' he had risked on Yorkshire Lass would come in the end out of Kathleen's pocket. It's a thing to be ashamed of, for a gentleman, of course, to have a sister who is obliged to dabble in paint for a livelihood: but, from the practical point of view, it has its advantages also. And Reggie found it a distinct advan-

tage during the racing season that he was able to draw upon Kathleen's earnings for unlimited loans, which were never repaid, it is true, but which were described as such in order to save undue wear and tear to Mr. Reginald's delicate feelings. It doesn't 'look well' to ask your sister point-blank for a present of a ten-pound note; but a loan to that amount, from time to time, to meet a pressing temporary emergency, is a form of advance that never grates for a moment upon the most refined susceptibilities.

'That's a nuisance,' Charlie Owen responded, with a sympathetic, wry face; 'for I suppose you counted upon it.'

Now, this was exactly what Mr. Reginald had done, after the fashion of the City clerk who fancies himself as a judge of horse-flesh; but he wasn't going to acknowledge it.

'It never does to count upon anything in the glorious uncertainty of racing,' he answered with a bounce, swallowing his disappointment in that resigned spirit which is born of a confident belief that your sister, after all, will have in the end to make good the deficit. 'Though, to be sure, I *was* in need of it; for I've asked Florrie Clarke and her mother to run round to the Gaiety for an hour with me this evening; and I can tell you it comes heavy on a fellow, and no mistake, to settle for the grub for Florrie's mother! She is a dab at lobster salad!'

'Then, you're taking them to supper afterwards!' Charlie inquired with admiration. One young fool invariably admires another for his courage and nobility in spending the money he hasn't got, to somebody else's final discomfort and detriment.

Reginald nodded a careless assent.

'To Romano's,' he answered, with justifiable pride in the background of his tone. 'When I do the thing at all, I like to do it properly; and Florrie's the sort of girl, don't you know, who's accustomed to see things done in the very best style; so I mean to go it.'

'What a fellow you are!' Charlie Owen exclaimed with heart-felt admiration. 'After a knock-down blow like this, that would dishearten most chappies!'

Mr. Reginald smiled a deprecatory smile of modest self approval.

'Well, I flatter myself I *am* a bit of a philosopher,' he admitted with candour, like one who glides lightly over his own acknowledged merits. 'Why don't you come too? There'd be room in my box for you.'

'Does it run to a box, then?' Charlie Owen asked, open-eyed.

And Reggie answered, with an expansive wave of his neatly-gloved hand:

'Do you suppose I'd ask Florrie and her mother to go in the pit? I imagine I know how to do the thing like a gentleman.'

'Well, of course, if you've got a box,' Charlie assented with alacrity, 'one more or less doesn't count. But still—there's the supper!'

Mr. Reginald dismissed the sordid suggestion with another dainty wave of his well-gloved left.

'When a gentleman asks another gentleman to sup with him,' he observed with sententious dignity, 'it isn't usual for his guest to make inquiries beforehand as to the cost of the entertainment.' After which noble rebuke, Charlie Owen felt it would be positive bad manners not to accept with effusion; and was lost in wonder, delight, and awe—as Reggie intended he

should be—at the magnanimity of a chappie who, after a loss like that, could immediately launch out into fresh extravagance by inviting a friend to a quite unnecessary and expensive banquet. What a splendid creature the fast young man really is, after all! and how nobly he dispenses unlimited hospitality to all and sundry on his relations' money!

So that evening at eight saw Mr. Reginald Hesslegrave in full evening dress and a neat hired brougham, stopping at the door of the Gaiety Theatre to deposit Mrs. Clarke and her daughter Florrie. The party, to be sure, was nothing if not correct; for mamma was there to ensure the utmost proprieties; and Miss Florrie herself, who was a well-conducted young lady, had no idea of doing anything more decided than accepting a box for nothing as affection's gift from the devoted Reggie. Miss Florrie's papa was an eminently respectable West-end money-lender; and Miss Florrie and her mamma were practically used, in the way of business, partly as decoy ducks for unwary youth, and partly as a means of recovering at once, in presents and entertainments, a portion of the money advanced by papa on those familiar philanthropic principles of 'note-of-hand at sight, without inquiry, and no security,' which so often rouse one's profound esteem and wonder in the advertisement columns of the daily papers. Unfortunately, however, it is found, for the most part, in this hard business world of ours, that philanthropy like this can only be made to pay on the somewhat exorbitant terms of sixty per cent., deducted beforehand. But Mr. Reginald, as it happened, was far too small game for either Miss Florrie or her papa to fly at; his friendship for the young lady was distinctly a platonic one. She and

her mamma used him merely as an amiable young fool who could fill in the odd evenings between more serious engagements, when papa's best clients took her to the opera with mamma, and presented her with a brooch or an amethyst bracelet out of the forty per cent. which alone remained to them from papa's munificence. Not that Miss Florrie's conduct was ever anything but the pink of propriety; with a connection like papa's, it was always on the cards that she might end (with good luck) by becoming 'my lady' in lieu of accumulated interest on bills renewed; and was it likely that Miss Florrie was going to fling away a first-rate chance in life like that by ill-timed entanglements with a penniless clerk in a stockbroker's office? Miss Florrie thought not: she knew her market worth too well for such folly; she might flirt, but she perfectly understood where to stop flirtation; meanwhile, she found Mr. Reginald Hesslegrave an agreeable and harmless companion, and an excellent wedge of an unobtrusive sort for attacking the narrow opening into certain grades of society. It 'looks well' to be seen about with mamma in the company of an excellently connected young man of no means at all; people can never accuse you, then, of unmitigated fortune-hunting.

Miss Florrie and her mamma were most charming that evening. Mrs. Hesslegrave herself would have been forced to admit they were really most charming. The mamma was as well dressed as could reasonably be expected—that is to say, not much more overdressed than in the nature of things a money-lender's wife must be; and her diamonds, Charlie Owen remarked with delight, were greatly noted and commented upon by feminine occupants of neighbouring

boxes. As for Reginald Hesslegrave, he felt the evening was what he would himself have described as 'a gigantic success.' 'It's all going off very well,' he observed with nervous pride to Charlie Owen as they paced the corridor, cigarette in mouth, during the interval between the acts.

And Charlie Owen, patting his back, made answer emphatically:

'Going off very well, man! Why, it's a thundering triumph! What a fellow you are to be sure! Ices in the box and everything! Clinking! simply clinking! The eldest son of a duke couldn't have done the thing better. It's made a distinct impression on the Clarkes, I can tell you.'

'You think so?' Reggie asked, with a proud flush of satisfaction.

'Think so?' Charlie repeated once more. 'Why, I can see it with half a glance. Florrie's gone on you, that's where it is. Visibly to the naked eye, that girl's clean gone on you!'

Mr. Reginald returned to the box feeling half an inch taller. He knew himself a lady-killer. And he noticed with pride that Miss Florrie and her mamma were on terms of bowing acquaintance with a great many people in the stalls and dress circle; the very best people; gentlemen for the most part, it is true, but still, a sprinkling of ladies, including among them Mrs. Algy Redburn, who ought by rights to be Lady Axminster. And though the ladies returned Miss Florrie's bows and smiles with a tinge of coldness, and seemed disinclined to catch the eagle eye of her mamma—who was a stoutish matron of a certain age and uncertain waist—it was an undeniable fact that those who did catch it were for the most part women

of title and of social distinction, in the fastest set: so that Mr. Reginald felt himself in excellent society.

As they were leaving the theatre, while Mrs. Clarke and Florrie went off in search of their wraps from the ladies' cloak-room, Reggie drew Charlie Owen mysteriously aside for a moment.

'Look here, old fellow,' he said coaxingly, in a whispered undertone, button-holing his friend as he spoke; 'you're coming on to supper with us. Could you manage to lend me a couple of sovereigns for a day or two?'

Charlie Owen looked glum. He pursed his under lip. Like Bardolph's tailor, he liked not the security.

'What's it for?' he asked dubiously.

Reggie made a clean breast of it.

'Well, the brougham and things have run into a little more than I expected,' he answered with a forced smile; 'and of course we must open a bottle of cham; and if Mrs. Clarke wants a second—she's a fish at fizz, I know—it'd be awkward, don't you see, if I hadn't quite cash enough to pay the waiter.'

'It would so,' Charlie responded, screwing up a sympathetic but exceedingly doubtful face.

'Do you happen to have a couple of quid about you?' Reggie demanded once more, with an anxious air.

Charlie Owen melted.

'Well, I have,' he answered slowly. 'But mind you, I shall want them on Saturday without fail, to pay my landlady. She's a demon for her rent. Raises blazes if it runs on. Will insist on it weekly. Can you promise me faithfully to let me have the oof back by Saturday?'

Reggie drew a sigh of relief.

'Honour bright!' he answered, clutching hard at the straw. 'It's all square, I assure you. I've remittances coming.'

'Where from?' Charlie continued, not wishing to be hard, but still anxious for 'the collateral,' as Florrie's pa[illegible] would have put it.

'Oh, I've telegraphed to-day to my people at Venice,' Reggie responded airily. But 'my people' of course was a euphemism for 'my sister.'

'And got an answer?' Charlie insisted. He didn't want to seem mean, but business is business, and he desired to know on what expectations precisely he was risking his money.

'Yes; here it is,' Reggie replied, drawing it out, somewhat sheepishly, from the recesses of his pocket. He didn't like to show it, of course; but he saw too well that on no other terms could he be spared the eternal disgrace of having to refuse Florrie Clarke's mamma a second bottle of Veuve Clicquot, should she choose to demand it.

Charlie ran his eye over the telegram. It was short but satisfactory.

'Entirely disapprove. Am sending the money. This is the last time. Remember.—KATHLEEN.'

'She always says that,' Mr. Reginald interposed in an apologetic undertone.

'Oh, dear yes; I know; it's a way they have,' Charlie responded with a tolerant smile, as one who was well acquainted with the strange fads of one's people. 'How much did you ask her for?'

'A tenner,' Mr. Reginald responded.

Charlie Owen drew the coins with slow deliberation

from his dress waistcoat pocket. 'Well, this is a debt of honour,' he said in a solemn voice, handing them over impressively. 'You'll pay me off, of course, before you waste any money on paying bills or landlords and such-like.'

Reggie slipped the two sovereigns into his trousers-pocket with a sigh of relief. 'You *are* a brick, Charlie!' he exclaimed, turning away quite happy, and prepared, as is the manner of such young gentlemen in general, to spend the whole sum recklessly at a single burst on whatever first offered, now he was relieved for the moment from his temporary embarrassment. For it is the way of your Reggies to treat a loan as so much cash in hand, dropped down from heaven, and to disburse it freely on the nearest recipient in light-hearted anticipation of the next emergency.

The supper was universally acknowledged to be the success of the evening. It often is, in fact, where the allowance of Veuve Clicquot is sufficiently unstinted. Mrs. Clarke was most affable, most increasingly affable; and as to Miss Florrie, a pretty little round-faced *ingénue*, with a vast crop of crisp black hair, cut short and curled, she was delightful company. It was her *rôle* in life to flirt; and she did it for the love of it. Reginald Hesslegrave was a distinctly good-looking young man, very well connected, and she really liked him. Not, of course, that she would ever for a moment have dreamed of throwing herself away for life on a man without the means to keep a carriage; but Miss Florrie was one of those modern young ladies who sternly dissociate their personal likes and dislikes from their matrimonial schemes; and as a person to sup with, to talk to, and to flirt with, she really liked

Master Reggie—nay, more, she admired him. For he knew how to 'go it'; and ability for 'going it' was in Miss Florrie's eyes the prince of the virtues. It was the one that enabled a man, however poor in reality, to give her the greatest amount of what she lived for—amusement. So Florrie flooded Reggie with the light of her round black eyes till he was fairly intoxicated with her. She played her crisp curls at him with considerable effect, and was charmed when he succumbed to them. 'Twas a pity he wasn't the heir to a hundred thousand pounds. If he had been, Miss Florrie thought, she might have got papa to discount it offhand on post-obits, and have really settled down to a quiet life of balls and theatres in his agreeable society.

So much smitten was Reggie, indeed, that before the end of the evening, under the expansive influence of that excellent Veuve Clicquot, he remarked chaffingly to Florrie, at a moment when Mrs. Clarke was deep in talk with Charlie Owen: 'I tell you what it is, Miss Clarke—or rather Florrie—I shall call you Florrie—some day, you and I will have to make a match of it!'

Miss Florrie did not resent this somewhat abrupt and inartistic method of broaching an important and usually serious subject. On the contrary, being an easy-going soul, she accepted it as a natural compliment to her charms, and smiled at it good-humouredly. But she answered none the less, with a toss of the crisp black curls: 'Well, if we're ever to do that, Mr. Hesslegrave, you must find the wherewithal first; for I can tell you I want a carriage and a yacht and a house-boat. The man for my heart is the man with a house-boat. As soon as you're in a position to set up a house-boat, you may invite me to share it with

you. And then'—she looked at him archly with a witching smile—'I may consider my answer.'

She was a taking little thing!—there was no denying it. 'Very bad style,' so the ladies in the stalls remarked to one another, as they scanned her through their opera-glasses; 'but awfully taking!' And Reginald Hesslegrave found her so. From that moment forth, it became his favourite day-dream that he had made a large fortune at a single stroke (on the turf, of course), and married the owner of the crisp black curls. So deep-rooted did this ideal become to him, indeed, that he set to work at once to secure the large fortune. And how? By working hard day and night, and saving and investing? Oh dear me, no! Such *bourgeois* methods are not for the likes of Mr. Reginald Hesslegrave, who prided himself upon being a perfect gentleman. By risking Kathleen's hard-earned money on the Derby favourite, and accepting 'tips' as to a 'dark horse' for the Leger!

CHAPTER IX.

BY THE BLUE ADRIATIC.

April in Venice, young ladies aver, is 'just too lovely for anything.' And Rufus Mortimer utilized one of its just too lovely days for his long-deferred project of a picnic to the Lido.

Do you know the Lido? 'Tis that long natural bulwark, 'the bank of sand which breaks the flow of Adria towards Venice,' as Shelley calls it. It stretches for miles and miles in a narrow belt along the mouth of the lagoons; on one side lies the ocean, and on one

the shallow pool of mudbanks and canals. This is the only place near Venice, indeed, where a horse can find foothold; and on that account, as well as for the sake of the surf-bathing, it is a favourite resort of Venetians and visitors in spring and summer. The side towards the lagoon rises high and dry, in a sort of native breakwater, like the lofty Chesil Beach that similarly cuts off the English Channel from the shallow expanse of the Fleet in Dorsetshire; its opposite front descends in a gentle slope to the level of the Adriatic, and receives on its wrinkled face the thunderous billows of that uncertain main, Horace's 'turbulent Hadria.' Hither, then, Rufus Mortimer brought his guests and friends one bright April morning, when the treacherous sea was sleeping calmly like a child, and no breath of wind from the Dalmatian hills disturbed the tranquil rest of its glassy bosom.

They crossed over partly in Mortimer's own private gondola, partly in a hired *barca*—a hencoop, as Arnold Willoughby irreverently called it—from the steps of the Molo. As they passed out of the harbour, the view behind them rose even lovelier than usual. That is the way to see Venice; its front-door is the sea; it breaks upon one full face as one looks at it from the Lido. We who arrive at it nowadays by the long and tedious railway embankment over the shallow lagoon hardly realize that we are entering the city of the Doges by its back-door. We come first upon the slums, the purlieus, the Ghetto. But the visitor who approaches the Bride of the Adriatic for the first time by sea from Trieste or Alexandria sees it as its makers and adorners intended he should see it. As he draws nigh shore, the great buildings by the water's edge

rise one after another before his enchanted eyes. He sees Fortuna on her golden ball above the Dogana di Mare; he sees the Doges' Palace with its arcade and its loggia; he sees the clustered cupolas and spires of St. Mark's; he sees the quaint volutes and swelling domes of Santa Maria della Salute. Then, as he nears the Molo, the vast panorama of beauty bursts upon him at once in all its detail—the Bridge of Sighs, the famed Lion Column, St. Theodore on his crocodile, St. Mark on his airy pinnacle, the Piazzetta, the Piazza, the Campanile, the Clock Tower. He lands by the marble steps, and finds himself face to face with the gorgeous pilasters of Sansovino's library, the façade of the great church, the porphyry statues, the gold and alabaster, the blaze of mosaics, the lavish waste of sculpture. With a whirling head, he walks on through it all, amazed, conscious of nothing else save a phantasmagoria of glory, and thanking heaven in his heart that at last he has seen Venice.

This was the view upon which the occupants of Rufus Mortimer's gondola looked back with delighted eyes that April morning. But this was not all. Behind and above it all, the snow-capped chain of the Tyrolese Alps and the hills of Cadore rose fairy-like in a semicircle. Their pencilled hollows showed purple: their peaks gleamed like crystal in the morning sun. Cloudless and clear, every glen and crag pinked out by the searching rays, they stood silhouetted in pure white against the solid blue sky of Italy. In front of them, St. Mark's and the Campanile were outlined in dark hues. 'Twas a sight to rejoice a painter's eyes. Arnold Willoughby and Kathleen Hesslegrave sat entranced as they looked at it.

Nothing rouses the emotional side of a man's

nature more vividly than to gaze at beautiful things with a beautiful woman. Arnold Willoughby sat by Kathleen's side and drank it all in delighted. He half made up his mind to ask her that very day whether, if he ever could succeed in his profession, she would be willing to link her life with a poor marine painter's.

He didn't mean to make her Lady Axminster. That was far from his mind. He would not have cared for those 'whose mean ambition aims at palaces and titled names,' as George Meredith has phrased it. But he wanted to make her Mrs. Arnold Willoughby.

As they crossed over to the Lido, he was full of a new discovery he had made a few days before. A curious incident had happened to him. In hunting among a bundle of papers at his lodgings, which his landlady had bought to tie up half-kilos of rice and macaroni, he had come, it appeared, upon a wonderful manuscript. He hardly knew himself at the time how important this manuscript was to become to him hereafter; but he was full of it, all the same, as a singular discovery.

'It's written in Italian,' he said to Kathleen; 'that's the funny part of it; but still, it seems, it's by an English sailor; and it's immensely interesting—a narrative of his captivity in Spain and his trial by the Inquisition, for standing up like a man for Her Grace's claim to the throne of England.'

'What's the date of it?' Kathleen asked, not knowing or not catching the special Elizabethan tinge of that phrase, Her Grace, instead of Her Majesty.

'Oh, Elizabeth, of course,' Arnold answered lightly. 'Such a graphic story! And the queerest part of it all is, it's written in cipher.'

'Then how did you make it out?' Kathleen asked admiringly. To her mind, it seemed a perfectly astonishing feat that any man should be able to decipher such a thing for himself by mere puzzling over it.

'Why, easily enough,' Arnold answered with a smile; 'for happily I took it for granted, since I found it in Italy, the language was Italian; so I soon spelt it out. Those sixteenth-century people always made use of the most simple ciphers—almost foolishly simple. Any child could read them.'

Kathleen looked up at him with profound admiration. For her own part, she couldn't imagine how on earth it could be done. 'How wonderful!' she exclaimed. 'You must show it to me some day. And it's interesting, is it? I should love to see it.'

'Yes, it's interesting,' Arnold answered. 'As interesting as a novel. A perfect romance. Most vivid and amusing. The writer was a man named John Collingham of Norfolk, the owner and skipper of an English barque; he was taken by the Spaniards off Cape Finisterre, and thrown into prison for six months at Cadiz. Afterwards he escaped, and made his way to Venice, where he wrote this memorial in cipher to the Council of Ten, whom he desired to employ him; but what became of him in the end I haven't yet got to. It takes some time to decipher the whole of it.'

That was all, for the moment. More important concerns put the manuscript afterwards for a time out of Kathleen's head; though in the end she had good reason indeed to remember it. However, just then, as soon as they landed, Rufus Mortimer hurried her off to admire the view from the top of the Lido; and

he took excellent care she should have no other chance that day of private conversation with Arnold Willoughby.

They lunched *al fresco* on the summit of the great bank, looking down on the sea to the right, and the long stretch of the shallow lagoon to the left, with the distant towers of Venice showing up with all their spires in the middle distance, and the jagged range of snowy Alps gleaming white in the background. As soon as they had finished, Rufus Mortimer managed to get Kathleen to himself for a quiet stroll along the sea-beach. The sand was hard and firm and strewn with seaweed; here and there a curled sea-horse lay tossed up by the tide; and innumerable tiny shells glistened bright like pearls on the line of high-water.

Kathleen felt a little shy with him. She guessed what was coming. But she pretended to ignore it, and began in her most conventional society tone:

'Have you heard that Canon Valentine and his wife are coming out here to Venice next week to visit us?'

Mortimer gazed at her with a comic little look of quizzical surprise. He had got away alone with her after no small struggle, and he meant to make the best of this solitary opportunity.

'Have I heard that Canon Valentine and his wife are coming?' he asked with a sort of genial satire in his voice. 'Now, do you think, Miss Hesslegrave, I planned this picnic to the Lido to-day, and got off with you alone here, for nothing else but to talk about that bore, Canon Valentine, and that stick of a wife of his?'

'I—I really don't know,' Kathleen faltered out demurely.

Mortimer gazed at her hard,

'Yes, you do,' he answered at last, after a long deep pause. 'You know it very well. You know you're playing with me. That isn't what I want, and you can see it, Miss Hesslegrave. You can guess what I've come here for. You can guess why I've brought you away all alone upon the sands.' He trembled with emotion. It took a good deal to work Rufus Mortimer up, but when once he was worked up, his feelings ran away with him. He quivered visibly. 'Oh, Miss Hesslegrave,' he cried, gazing wildly at her, 'you must have seen it long since. You can't have mistaken it. You must have known I loved you! I've as good as told you so over and over again, both in London and here; but never till to-day have I ventured to ask you. I didn't dare to ask, because I was so afraid you'd say me nay. And now it has come to this: I *must* speak. I must. I can't keep it back within myself any longer.'

Every woman is flattered by a man's asking for her love, even when she means to say 'No' outright to him; and it was something for Kathleen to have made a conquest like this of the American millionaire, whom every girl in Venice was eager to be introduced to. She felt it as such. Yet she drew back, all tremulous.

'*Please* don't, Mr. Mortimer,' she pleaded, as the American tried hard to seize her vacant hand. 'I—I wish you wouldn't. I know you're very kind; but—I don't want you to take it.'

'Why not?' Mortimer asked, drawing back a little space and gazing at her earnestly.

'Because,' Kathleen answered, finding it hard indeed so to phrase her feelings as not unnecessarily to hurt the young man's, 'I like you very much—

as a friend, that is to say—but I could never love you.'

'You *thought* you could once,' Mortimer replied, with a face of real misery. 'I could see you thought it once. In Venice here, last year, you almost hesitated; and if your mother hadn't shown herself so anxious to push my interest with you, I really believe you would have said "Yes" then to me. What has made the difference now? You must—you must tell me.'

'I hardly know myself,' Kathleen answered truthfully.

'But I *must* hear it,' the American answered, placing himself in front of her in an eager attitude. He had all the chivalrous feeling of his countrymen towards women. Rich as he was, he felt, and rightly felt, it was a great thing to ask such a girl as Kathleen Hesslegrave for the gift of her heart; and having wound himself up to make what for him was that fatal plunge, he must know the worst forthwith; he must learn once for all then and there whether or not there was any chance left for him. So he stood with clasped hands repeating over and over again: 'You *must* tell me, Miss Hesslegrave. I have a right to know. The feeling I bear towards you gives me a claim to know it.'

'I can't tell myself,' Kathleen replied, a little falteringly, for his earnestness touched her, as earnestness always touches women. 'I shall always like you very much, Mr. Mortimer, but I can never love you.'

'Do you love somebody else, will you tell me that?' the young man asked, almost fiercely.

Kathleen hesitated, and was lost.

'I—I don't know myself, Mr. Mortimer,' she answered feebly.

Mortimer drew a long breath.

'Is it Willoughby?' he asked at last, with a sudden turn that half frightened her.

Kathleen began to cry.

'Mr. Mortimer,' she exclaimed, 'you have no right to try to extort from me a secret I have never told yet to anybody—hardly even to myself. Mr. Willoughby is nothing more than a friend and a companion to me.'

But the American read her meaning through her words, for all that. 'Willoughby!' he cried—'Willoughby! It's Willoughby who has supplanted me. I was half afraid of this.' He paused irresolute for a moment. Then he went on much lower: 'I ou ht to hate him for this, Miss Hesslegrave; but somehow I don't. Perhaps it isn't in my blood. But I like him and admire him. I admire his courage. I admire your courage for liking him. The worst of it is, I admire you, too, for having the simple honesty to prefer him to me—under all the circumstances. I know you are doing right; I can't help admiring it. That penniless man against American millions! But you have left my heart poor. Oh, so poor! so poor! There was one thing in life upon which I had fixed it, and you have given that to Willoughby; and, Miss Hesslegrave, I can't even quarrel with you for giving it!'

Kathleen leant forward towards him anxiously. 'Oh, for heaven's sake,' she cried, clasping her hands, 'don't betray me, Mr. Mortimer! I have never breathed a single word of this to him, nor he to me. It was uncanny of you to find it out. I ask you, as a woman, keep it—keep it sacred, for my sake, I beg of you!'

Mortimer looked at her with the intensest affection in his eyes. He spoke the plain truth; that woman was the one object in life on which he had set his heart; and without her, his wealth was as worthless dross to him.

'Why, Miss Hesslegrave,' he answered, 'what do you think I am made of? Do you think I could surprise a woman's secret like that, and not keep it more sacred than anything else on earth? You must have formed indeed a very low opinion of me. I can use this knowledge but for one aim and end—to do what I can towards making Willoughby's path in life a little smoother and easier for him. I wished to do so for his own sake before; I shall wish it a thousand times more for your sake in future.'

Tears stood in his eyes. He spoke earnestly, seriously. He was one of those rare men who rise far above jealousy. Kathleen was touched by his attitude—what woman would not have been? For a moment she half regretted she could not answer him 'Yes.' He was so genuinely in love, so deeply and honestly grieved at her inability to love him. Of her own accord she took his hand.

'Mr. Mortimer,' she said truthfully, 'I like you better this minute than I have ever liked you. You have spoken like a friend; you have spoken like a gentleman. Few men at such a moment could have spoken as you have done. Believe me, indeed, I am deeply grateful for it.'

'Thank you,' Mortimer answered, brushing his tears away shamefacedly. Americans are more frank about such matters than we self-restrained Britons. 'But, oh, Miss Hesslegrave, after all, what poor comfort that is to a man who asks your love, who loves you devotedly!'

They turned with one accord, and wandered back along the sands in silence towards the rest of the party. So far as Rufus Mortimer was concerned, that picnic had been a dead failure. 'Twas with an effort that he managed to keep up conversation the rest of the afternoon with the mammas of the expedition. His heart had received a very heavy blow, and he hardly sought to conceal it from Kathleen's observant vision.

Sad that in this world what is one man's loss is another man's gain. Arnold Willoughby, seeing those two come back silent from their stroll along the sands together, looked hard in Kathleen's face, and then in Mortimer's—and read the whole history. He felt a little thrill of pleasure course through his spine like a chill. 'Then he has asked her,' Arnold thought; 'and she—she has refused him. Dear girl, she has refused him! I can trust her, after all. She prefers the penniless sailor to the richest man this day in Venice!'

It is always so. We each of us see things from our own point of view. Any other man would have taken it in the same way as Arnold Willoughby. But Kathleen went home that evening very heavy at heart for her American lover. He was so kind and true, so manly and generous, she felt half grieved in her heart she couldn't have said 'Yes' to him.

CHAPTER X.

VISITORS IN VENICE.

Canon Valentine stared about him in the midst of the Piazza with a stony British stare of complete disapprobation. He rejected it *in toto*.

'So this is modern Venice!' he exclaimed, with the air of a man who revisits some painful scene he has known in its better days. 'This is what emancipated Italy has made of it! Dear me, Mrs. Hesslegrave, how altered it is, to be sure, since the good old times of the Austrian occupation!'

'Ah, yes,' Kathleen interposed, not entering into his humour. 'No doubt you see great changes, Canon. You haven't been here before since United Italy. How much lovelier it must look to you, now it's really and truly Italian!'

The Canon gazed at her, full face, in the blankest astonishment.

'Quite the contrary,' he said curtly. 'I see very great changes—but they're all for the worse. These pigeons, for example; they were always a nuisance; flying about under one's feet, and getting in one's way at every twist and turn—but there are ten times as many of them now as there ever used to be.'

'Why, I love the pigeons,' Kathleen cried, all amazed. 'They're so tame and familiar. In England, the boys would throw stones at them and frighten them; but here, under the shadow of St. Mark's, they seem to feel as if they belonged to the place, and as if man was a friend of theirs. Besides, they're so characteristic; and they're historically interesting too,

don't you know! They're said to be the descendants of the identical birds that brought Doge Dandolo good news from friends on shore, which enabled him to capture Crete, and so lay the foundations of the Venetian Empire. I just love the pigeons.'

'I dare say you do,' the Canon answered testily; 'but that's no reason why they should be allowed to stroll about under people's heels as they walk across the Piazza. In the good old Austrian days, I'm sure, that was never permitted. Intolerable, simply!—And then the band! What very inferior music!—When the Austrians were here, you remember, Amelia, we had a capital bandmaster; and everybody used to come out to listen to his German tunes in the evening. The Square was always gay with bright uniforms then—such beautiful coats! Austrian hussar coats, deep braided on either side, and flung carelessly open. The officers looked splendid by the tables at Florio's. Venice was Venice in those days, I can tell you, before all this nonsense cropped up about United Italy.'

'But what could be lovelier,' Kathleen exclaimed, half shocked at such treason, 'than the Italian officers in their picturesque blue cloaks—the Bersaglieri especially? I declare, I always fall quite in love with them.'

'Very likely,' the Canon answered. He was never surprised, for his part, at *any* aberration of feeling on the part of young girls, since this modern education craze. It had unsexed women for him. 'But the place is spoiled, for all that. You should have seen it at its best, before it was vulgarized. Even St. Mark's is gilded and furbished up now out of all recognition. It's not fit to look at.—Amelia, my dear, don't you

agree with me, the place was far more picturesque when the Austrians had it?'

'Oh, very much more picturesque!' Mrs. Valentine echoed dutifully. She was a meek-looking old lady, in a long black cloak, absolutely overborne by fifty years of the Canon's individuality, and she would have answered the exact opposite in perfect good faith if only she perceived the Canon expected it. Irreverent young men in their cathedral town were wont to speak of her familiarly as 'the prophet's donkey.'

The Canon examined critically the façade of St. Mark's—that glorious composite façade, of no particular time or style or fashion, which Kathleen admired so fervently, with its fantastic mixture of all elements alike—Byzantine, Oriental, Romanesque, Gothic, Renaissance. 'Very mixed!' the Canon murmured, holding his head on one side—'very mixed indeed. I can't say I care for it. It's so low and squat. And how the mosaics disfigure it!'

In answer to criticism like that, poor Kathleen had nothing to say; so she wisely held her tongue. She knew when to be silent. The Canon strolled on, with Mrs. Hesslegrave by his side, past Leopardo's bronze sockets, which still hold aloft the great flagstaffs of the Republic in front of the marvellous church; past the corner of St. Mark's where stand the square pillars from St. Saba at Ptolemais; past the main gate of the palace, with its sculptured design of Doge Francesco Foscari, in cap and robes, kneeling in submission before the lion of St. Mark; past the noble arcades and loggias of the Piazzetta; past the two huge columns in the seaward square, and down by slow degrees to the steps of the Molo. Kathleen listened in wonder, half incredulous, to his criticisms as he passed.

She was so little accustomed herself to anything save breathless admiration and delight at the glories of Venice, that this strange attitude of cold blame seemed to her well-nigh unnatural. To think that any man should stand unawed before the very faces of St. Mark and St. Theodore!

At the Molo they called a gondola, and glided in it slowly down the Grand Canal. The Canon thought it had fallen off since the days of the Austrians. Half the palaces were worse kept, and the other half were scraped and cleaned and redecorated throughout in the most ridiculous Wardour Street fashion. He couldn't bear to see Venice Blundell-Mapled. It was all quite depressing. But what astonished Kathleen the most was the singular fact that, after passing the bend in the canal by the Palazzo Contarini, the Canon seemed almost entirely to forget in what city they were, though this was his first day for thirty years in the sea-born city, and, looking no longer at churches or palaces, began to gossip about the people he had left behind him in London. His world went with him. They might have been in Bond Street or Rotten Row, for any notice he took of the Rialto or the Cà d'Oro. He glided past the Fondaco without even a single word: he never deigned to give a glance to the School of St. Mark or the tower of San Zanipolo. To Kathleen's artistic soul it was all a strange puzzle. She couldn't understand it. Had the man no eyes in his head that he could pass those glorious arcades, those exquisite balconies, without even looking up at them?

'And you were going to tell us something about this Axminster business,' Mrs. Hesslegrave remarked after a pause, as they reached the front of the Arsenal on

their circuitous peregrination, which Kathleen had arranged so as to take in at one round all the principal buildings. 'Poor dear Lady Axminster! Has anything been done yet about this affair of the peerage?'

'Oh dear yes,' the Canon replied, brightening up at the suggestion. 'I was coming to that. I intended to tell you all about it. Haven't you read it in the papers? We're in hopes at last we're really going to get a definite settlement.'

'That's well,' Mrs. Hesslegrave echoed with a sympathetic smirk. 'What's being done about it now? We haven't seen a paper in this benighted place for weeks and weeks, don't you know—except, of course, *Galignani*. It's really quite dreadful how one falls behind the times about all the most important and interesting things that are going on in England!'

The Canon looked big. This appeal flattered him. He liked to feel he came primed with news about the best people. 'Well, we've taken the thing to the House of Lords,' he said, with as much delight as if he were himself the appellant. 'Poor Algy has claimed the peerage on the ground that his cousin Bertie is dead, as I told you. We've reduced success to a practical certainty. The Lords will adjudicate on his claim in a week or two; but it's a foregone conclusion. I'm very glad, I must say, for Algy's sake, and for his wife's too. She's a nice little thing, Mrs. Algy Redburn!'

'My brother knows her slightly,' Kathleen said, with a tolerant smile, 'and seems to think a great deal of her.'

'Oh yes; she's a charming woman,' Mrs. Hesslegrave interposed—'a most charming woman.' (Mrs. Hesslegrave thought all peers and peeresses, actual or

prospective, particularly charming—even more charming, indeed, than the rest of the people in the best society.)

The Canon took no notice, however, of these interjected remarks. He severely ignored them. To say the truth, he regarded the entire Axminster connection as his own private property, from a social point of view, and rather resented than otherwise the impertinent suggestion that anyone else in the world could have anything to do with them. 'Yes, we've reduced it to a practical certainty,' he went on, leaning back in his place in the gondola and staring hard at the water. 'The crux of the case consisted, of course, in the difficulty of proving that the man Douglas Overton, who shipped from the port of London in the *Saucy Sally*—that was the name of the vessel, if I recollect aright—for Melbourne, Australia, was really the same man as Albert Ogilvie Redburn, seventh Lord Axminster. And it was precious hard to prove satisfactorily, I can tell you; but Maria has proved it—proved it up to the hilt. Maria's a very clever woman of the world, and she knows how to work these things like a private detective. Her lawyer said to her in my hearing: "Nobody but you, Lady Axminster, would ever have succeeded in pulling it through; but thanks to your ability and energy and acumen, not even the House of Lords can have the shadow of a doubt about it." And the House of Lords, you may take your affidavit, will doubt anything any mortal on earth could doubt, to keep a claimant out of a peerage, if only they can manage it.'

'But you think it's quite safe now?' Mrs. Hesslegrave asked with interest. Anything that referred to

a peer of the realm had for her mind a perfectly enthralling attraction.

'Oh dear yes, quite safe. Not a doubt in the world of it. You see, we've established, in the first place, the fact that the man Douglas Overton really *was* Bertie Redburn, which is always something. And we've established in the second place the complementary fact that the *Saucy Sally*, from London for Melbourne, went ashore on some wretched island nobody ever heard of in the Indian Ocean, and that all souls on board perished—including, of course, the man Douglas Overton, who is Bertie Redburn, who is the late Lord Axminster. A child can see it—let alone the Privilege Committee.'

'I'm glad it's going to be settled,' Mrs. Hesslegrave remarked with unction. 'It's such a dreadful thing for poor Mr. Algernon Redburn to be kept so long, through no fault of his own, out of the money and title.'

'Oh, dreadful,' the Canon assented—'dreadful, dreadful, dreadful! But there, poor Bertie never had any conscience! It was quite painful the distressing views he used to hold on such subjects, for a man in his position. I always set it down to the gipsy blood in him. I've heard him say more than once he longed to be doing something that he called useful for the mass of the community. Long before he gave way to these abnormal longings, and neglected his natural duties, and ran away to sea, he's told me time and again he felt a sailor's life was a life of undoubted value and usefulness to the country. A sailor was employed in carrying commodities from one place where they were produced to another place where they were wanted or eaten or something—consumed, I think he called it—

and nobody could deny that was a good and useful thing for the people that consumed them. "Very well, Bertie," said I—half in a joke, don't you know —"then why shouldn't you go yourself, and carry coals to Newcastle, or whatever else may be the crying want in that line at the moment?"—never dreaming, of course, the poor silly boy would go and follow my advice, as he did to the letter. But there! these things come out all right in the long-run. "There's a divinity that shapes our ends," as Tennyson or somebody says—ah, thank you, *was* it Shakespeare? —"rough-hew them how we may;" and that's been the case, I say, with this Axminster peerage business. For the upshot of it all is, that poor Bertie's dead and gone, sooner than one could reasonably have expected, and Algy's come into the property and title before his time; which is a very desirable thing to have happened: for Bertie might have married a woman after his own heart, no doubt—a sailor's Poll for choice—and if he had, why, one trembles to think what the children might have been like—a perfect disgrace to their ancestry!'

Mrs. Hesslegrave smiled an acquiescent smile. But as for Kathleen, a flash of light broke suddenly upon her. 'A sailor is employed in carrying commodities from the place where they are produced to the place where they are needed; and that nobody can deny to be on the whole a useful and a valuable function for society!' Surely this line of reasoning, were it right or wrong, sounded strangely familiar to her! And then, as she thought it over, it broke upon her like a revelation that she had heard similar words before now—from Arnold Willoughby! From Arnold Willoughby! From the courteous artist-

sailor. A strange misgiving seized upon her. If Lord Axminster could disguise himself as Douglas Overton, why not also as Arnold Willoughby? She thought at once of her sailor friend's extraordinary knowledge of art and literature for a common sailor; of his chivalrous manners; of his demeanour, which so belied his dress and his pretensions. Turning sharply to Canon Valentine she ventured to put all at once the dubious question:

'Did Lord Axminster paint? Had he any knowledge of art, I mean?'

'Oh dear me, yes!' the Canon answered without a second's hesitation. 'He studied in Paris under a first-rate painter, a fellow with one of their long-winded double-barrelled names: Bastien-somebody it was; I never *can* get the hang of them.'

Kathleen asked no more. Her heart was strangely troubled. For her sailor had spoken more than once incidentally of Bastien-Lepage's studio. Loyalty to Arnold Willoughby made her hold her peace, and refrain from blurting out the doubt that rose within her. If he was really Lord Axminster, why, it would be wrong of her even to attempt to surprise his secret —still more to betray it. The words from which she suspected she discovered his identity had been spoken in confidence, in the most private conversation. Kathleen couldn't help framing to herself offhand a pretty little romance, based on the familiar Lord-of-Burleigh model—'He was but a landscape painter, And a village maiden she!' A romance of how this young man had tried to win her love as a common sailor (and what was more, succeeded in it), and how he meant in the end to astonish the world by telling her he was an Earl, and carrying her off unawares to

his home in Devonshire, to share the fancied glories of Membury Castle.

> 'And while now she wonders blindly,
> Nor the meaning can divine,
> Proudly turns he round and kindly,
> "All of this is mine and thine."'

'Twas a romantic little day-dream. To say the truth, Kathleen regarded it only as such. For as yet she had no positive reason to believe that Arnold Willoughby even loved her. She had but guessed it instinctively, with a woman's intuition. And as to his real position in life she knew absolutely nothing. The singular coincidence in thought and phrase between the things he had said to her and the things the Canon repeated as Lord Axminster's sayings was indeed close enough; but it might be accidental. No human being is ever really unique; every thought and feeling we can have, somebody else has had in almost the same form, we may be sure, before us. And perhaps they had both taken word and thought alike from some previous thinker, as often happens with all of us. For aught she knew to the contrary it might be some commonplace of Emerson's or Thoreau's. At any rate, Kathleen attached no serious importance to this flash of identification, at least after the first moment. Still, she went on indulging the day-dream, as one often will, for many minutes together, out of mere fanciful delight in it. It gave her some slight relief from the *cling, cling, cling* of the Canon's perpetual chatter about the sayings and doings of his great folk in London. While he went droning on to Mrs. Hesslegrave about Lady This and Lady That, their virtues and their delinquencies,

Kathleen leaned back in her seat in the broad Italian sunshine, and closed her ears to it all mentally, while she enlarged to herself upon this Axminster day-dream, and saw herself as Arnold Willoughby's bride pacing entranced through the full leaf of June at Membury Castle.

At last she shut her eyes for a moment, as they were nearing a bridge at one familiar corner, where a Romanesque staircase of exquisite workmanship ran spirally up outside a round tower in the background. It helped her day-dream somewhat to shut her eyes: she could see the great oaks of an English park: she could see the fallow deer on dappled spots of shade under the spreading chestnuts. A sharp cry from the Canon made her open them again suddenly. Glancing up in alarm, she looked in the direction where her visitor's eyes were fixed, and saw, leaning on the parapet of the high-pitched bridge that spanned their canal close by—who else but Arnold Willoughby!

The Canon's last words, unheeded as he spoke them, now rang clear in her ears—'He's dead; that's certain. We've got full particulars. All hands were lost—and he *must* have been lost among them.'

But this moment, at sight of Arnold Willoughby's bent head, with one finger twisted carelessly in the lock behind his ear, the Canon sat staring wildly in front of him with wide-open eyes.

'Why, look there!' he cried, taken aback, in a voice of something very little short of horror. 'Look there! Who's that! The man on the bridge just in front of us?'

'What's the matter with him!' Mrs. Hesslegrave exclaimed, following blankly the direction of the Canon's eyes. She had always been sure there must

be something seriously wrong about that dreadful Willoughby man; and now they were discovering it. Could the Canon have recognised him as an escaped convict, or told him at a glance as the Banbury murderer?

But Canon Valentine gazed harder and more steadily than any of them. He seized Kathleen's arm with a convulsive start.

'Yes, it's him!' he said excitedly, in a tone of blank alarm; 'a good deal altered, of course, and quite disguised beyond anybody else's recognition. But it's him, sure enough! I should know him in a thousand!'

'It's *who?*' Mrs. Hesslegrave faltered out, hardly daring to ask.

The Canon gasped for breath. He could only just speak.

'Why, Bertie!' he answered low, leaning forward to whisper it. 'Don't you understand? Bertie Redburn! The man that's dead! The late Lord Axminster!'

CHAPTER XI.

MRS. HESSLEGRAVE MISAPPREHENDS.

The words were scarcely out of the Canon's mouth when straightway he repented of them. If this was really Bertie, he ought to have held his peace. The man was skulking in that case—quite evidently skulking; he wanted to disappear: he didn't wish to be recognised. It was no business of the Canon's, then, to drag a fellow-creature against his will out of voluntary retirement, and so spoil Algy's chance of obtain-

ing the peerage. On the other hand, if it wasn't Bertie, the Canon should, of course, have been the last man on earth to call attention to a likeness—really, now he came to think of it, a very remote likeness—to the late Earl, and so give rise to a rumour which might prove prejudicial in the end to Algy's position. He had cried out in the heat of the moment, in the first flush of surprise; he began to hedge at once, as soon as ever he perceived, on cooler reflection, the possible consequences of his instinctive action. This is a very small planet. Sooner or later, we all collide upon its surface.

As for Kathleen, her first thought was one of loyalty to Arnold. If he *was* Lord Axminster—and of this she had now very little doubt left; the double coincidence settled it—he was trying to hide himself: he didn't wish to be recognised. That was enough for her. He desired that his personality as Arnold Willoughby should not be mixed up with his personality as Bertie Redburn. Therefore, it was her clear duty not to betray him in any way. She glanced nervously at her mother. Mrs. Hesslegrave had half risen from her seat, overjoyed to hear that this was really an English earl, whose high birth and intrinsic nobility they had discovered for themselves under the guise of a common sailor, and was just about to call out: 'Mr. Willoughby! Mr. Willoughby!' But Kathleen darted upon her suddenly such a warning glance that she withered up forthwith, and held her peace devoutly. She didn't know why she was to keep silent; but she could see, from Kathleen's half-imperious, half-imploring look, there was some good reason for it; and Mrs. Hesslegrave was one of those rare stupid people who recognise the fact of their own

stupidity, and allow themselves to be blindly guided in emergencies by others. So she held her peace, merely remarking, as she sat down again:

'So you think that's Lord Axminster! Dressed up like that! Well, really now, how interesting!'

Arnold Willoughby's face, meanwhile, was all the time turned half in the opposite direction. He did not see the gondola, nor Kathleen, nor the Canon. He was engaged, in fact, in watching and mentally photographing for artistic purposes the graceful movements of a passing barge as she swung slowly through the bridge over whose balustrade he was hanging. While Mrs. Hesslegrave spoke, he turned and went on without observing them. Next instant, he was lost in the crowd that surged and swayed through the narrow *calle*. The danger was averted. He had never so much as observed the Canon.

As for that astute old gentleman, now he had recovered his breath, he saw his mistake at once, and faced it boldly. When Mrs. Hesslegrave said, 'So you think that's Lord Axminster?' he answered immediately, with perfect self-control:

'No, I don't. I was mistaken. It was—a passing fancy. For a second I imagined—merely imagined, don't you know—the man looked something like him. I suppose it was the sailor get-up which just at first deceived me. Poor Axminster used to dress like a sailor when he yachted. Amelia, my dear, that was *not* Bertie, was it? You could see the man distinctly.'

'Oh dear no, Fred,' Mrs. Valentine echoed in a voice of profound conviction; 'not the least bit like him!'

The Canon frowned slightly. Amelia had bettered

her instructions unbidden. He *was* the least bit like him, else why should the Canon have mistaken him at first sight for his kinsman Bertie? But not very like.

'A mere superficial resemblance,' he went on, hedging violently. 'Just at the first glance, to be sure—having my head full of the subject, and seeing the sailor dress—I mistook him for Bertie. But when I came to look again, the fellow was altogether different. Same build, perhaps, but features gone shorter and thicker and flatter. A man may dye his hair, and cut his beard, and so forth; but, hang it all, Mrs. Hesslegrave! he can't go and get rid of his own born features.'

He talked all the rest of the way home of nothing on earth except singular resemblances and mistaken identities. There were Perkin Warbeck, and Edmund Wyld, and the Tichborne Claimant. There was Sidney Carton in the 'Tale of Two Cities.' And he came back always to the fundamental point, that the features of a face at least—the features must *always* remain; you might dress, and you might paint, but there was no possibility of getting over the features. He over-elaborated this issue, in fact. Kathleen could see from every phrase he was sure in his own heart he had seen Bertie Redburn, and was trying to argue himself, and still more his hearers, out of that positive conviction. Even Mrs. Hesslegrave saw it, indeed, and murmured aside to Kathleen, as they stood on the steps of the Molo:

'That *is* Lord Axminster, Kitty, and the dear Canon knew it; but, for Algernon Redburn's sake, he didn't like to acknowledge it.'

Kathleen gazed at her seriously.

'Mother, mother,' she cried, in a low voice, 'for heaven's sake, don't say so! Don't say anything about it. You won't understand yet; but when we get home, I'll tell you. *Please* say nothing more now. If you do, you may upset everything!'

A vague idea crossed Mrs. Hesslegrave's mind at that moment, that Kathleen might perhaps have known this all along, and that that might account for her being so much taken up with this dreadful sailor-man —who wasn't really a dreadful sailor-man at all, as it turned out, but the real Lord Axminster! If so, how delightful! However, she waited for more light on these matters in Kathleen's own good time, only murmuring, meanwhile, half under her breath, to her daughter:

'Well, whoever he is, he's a charming fellow. You must admit, yourself, I've thought all along he's a charming fellow.'

By this time the Canon had settled with the gondolier—after a resolute attempt at resistance to the man's extortionate endeavour to exact his proper fare by municipal tariff—and was ready to stroll up to the Hesslegraves' apartments. For it was a principal clause in the Canon's private creed that every foreigner is always engaged in a conspiracy to defraud every British subject on whom he can lay his hands; and that the way to make your road easy across the Continent is to fight every item of every account, all along the line, the moment it is presented. The extortionate gondolier had conquered, however, by producing a printed tariff which fixed his hire at the modest rate of a franc an hour; so the Canon, paying it out without a sou of *pourboire*, strode on towards the lodgings, disconsolate and distracted. He knew

in his heart of hearts that was really Axminster; much altered, no doubt, by deliberate disguise; distorted beyond belief, but still undeniably Axminster; and he firmly resolved never to mention his conclusion for worlds to anyone—not even to Amelia. A man has no right to appear and disappear and then suddenly crop up again by fits and starts in this uncanny manner—to play bo-peep, as it were, with the House of Lords, the most dignified, exalted, and supreme court in the United Kingdom. Once dead, always dead, was a rule that ought to be applied to these Tichbornian revivalists. If you choose to go out like a candle of your own free will, why, the world should sternly decline to recognise you when you want to come to life again at inconvenient moments. There should be a Bill brought in to declare Bertie Redburn was really dead; and then dead he should remain, by Act of Parliament!

But as soon as they were inside the house, and Kathleen had gone up with her mother and Mrs. Valentine into her pretty little bedroom to take off her bonnet, the Canon's own wife gave vent explosively to a fearful and wholly unexpected disclosure. 'You know, my dear,' she said confidentially, 'that *was* Lord Axminster. I feel quite sure of it. Only, of course, I wouldn't say so, on dear Fred's account. You know dear Fred can't bear to be contradicted.'

Once more Kathleen darted a warning look at her mother; and once more Mrs. Hesslegrave accepted the hint blindly. 'But he was so different, the Canon thought,' she remarked, just to keep up the conversation, wondering dimly all the while what this mystification could mean—too deep, in fact, for a quiet, respectable old lady's fathoming.

'Oh, you can't deceive *me!*' Mrs. Valentine answered with warmth. 'I'm *sure* it was Lord Axminster. And I'll tell you how I know: his features were really changed, exactly as Fred said: he must have had something done to them. They say you can get your face moulded like putty, if you choose to bear it, nowadays. But he had always a nervous trick of pulling one back lock of his hair, as he stood still and thought—like this, don't you know! a sort of back-handed twirl: and the moment I saw him, I remembered it instantly. He might walk down Bond Street any morning, and meet every friend he ever knew in the world, and not one in a thousand would ever suspect it was he; but Fred and I, we would know, because we saw such a lot of him as a child, and were accustomed to reprove him for this same awkward trick of his.'

And, as a matter of fact, the moment Mrs. Valentine mentioned it, Kathleen recollected perfectly that she had often observed Arnold Willoughby stand in just the way she mimicked, pulling a particular lock at the back of his hair, whenever he was observant of a person's face, or attentive to any element in a picture or landscape.

The moment she could get alone with her mother upstairs, she began to speak to her seriously.

'Mother,' she said in her most coaxing tone, 'you *were* so good to take my hints. I didn't want Canon Valentine to know who Mr. Willoughby was—I mean, what name he calls himself—or that you and I knew him; for I'm sure the Canon was right: Mr. Willoughby's Lord Axminster.'

Mrs. Hesslegrave made no immediate reply except to step forward with the utmost gentleness and press

a motherly kiss upon her daughter's forehead. 'Oh, Kitty,' she cried, gazing fondly at her, 'how awfully clever of you! My darling, I'm so glad! And I've been seeing all along how much attention he was paying you.'

Kathleen flushed up to her eyes again. It was a way she had when deeply moved. And she knew her mother was very much pleased with her indeed; for only when very much pleased did Mrs. Hesslegrave ever address her by her pet name of Kitty. 'But that's not all, mother,' she went on eagerly. 'I want you to promise me, oh, ever so faithfully, you won't tell anybody who he is, or anything else about him. He wouldn't like it, if you did. Promise me, dearest, promise me!'

Mrs. Hesslegrave drew back for a second, lost in mazes of thought. She couldn't quite understand this queer Axminster mystery. Then, being a romantic old lady, as many old ladies are, she wove for herself on the spot a little private romance of how it had all happened. Lord Axminster, it appeared, distrusting all womankind, after his bitter experience with Lady Sark, had come abroad in disguise as a common sailor, in order to look out for some girl he could really love—some girl who could really love him, as a man wishes to be loved, for himself, not for his estate, his rank or his title. But Kathleen, like a clever girl that she was, had discovered by intuition his real position in life under those humble surroundings, and had fallen in love with him, and made him fall in love with her. Mrs. Hesslegrave could understand now what she had never understood before—how a well-conducted girl like her Kitty could have permitted herself to form a romantic attachment for a

man apparently so very far beneath her. It was just like Kitty to have unmasked the real Earl; in her joy and pride—to think her own daughter should have captured a peer of the realm under such adverse conditions by sheer dint of insight—Mrs. Hesslegrave once more bent tenderly forward, and kissed the wondering Kathleen a second time on her forehead.

'I'll promise whatever you like, dear,' she said in a very pleased tone, for this was a great occasion, 'Oh, Kitty, I'm so delighted! And indeed, dear, I'm sorry I ever seemed to throw any obstacles in Mr. Willoughby's way—I mean, in Lord Axminster's. But there! you'll forgive me: I didn't understand the circumstances as you did. And though I didn't quite approve of your seeing so much as you did of him—under misapprehension, of course, as to his real place in society—you must remember yourself I always allowed that, viewed as a man alone, he was a most charming person.'

Kathleen didn't exactly understand what her mother was driving at; these words were too deep for her: but for the moment she didn't think it necessary to inquire as to their hidden meaning: she was so afraid her mother might by some imprudence betray Arnold Willoughby's secret. And no matter why he wished it kept, she felt for her own part 'twas a point of honour for them both to insist upon keeping it. So she said very hurriedly:

'Whatever you do, dear mother, don't let Canon Valentine know Mr. Willoughby's a friend of ours. Don't say a word about him, in fact. Let the Canon suppose the man he saw on the bridge is a perfect stranger to all of us. I must manage to prevent Mr. Willoughby from visiting the house for the present,

somehow. If Canon Valentine were to find out who he really was, it would spoil all—and then Mr. Willoughby would be so dreadfully disappointed.'

Mrs. Hesslegrave caught instinctively at that one phrase, 'spoil all,' which confirmed her at once in her most romantic preconceptions. Then it was just as she expected: the Earl and Kitty had arrived at an understanding. There was a mystery in the case, of course; but Kitty would clear it all up; and she should live yet to see her only daughter a countess.

'My darling,' the proud mother said, looking at her with affection—for it is something to have a daughter who can catch earls in disguise—'tell me all about it! When did Lord Axminster ask you?'

'He has never asked me, mother,' Kathleen answered with a very deep blush. Then she paused for a moment. Her heart rose into her mouth. The avowal seemed so natural at a crisis like that. 'But I love him,' she went on, clasping her hands; 'and I'm sure he loves me. Oh, mother, don't say anything that would lead him to suppose you've heard a word of all this. If you do, all will be lost! I know he wouldn't care for any of us to know he was really Lord Axminster.'

She trembled for her unavowed lover, now the truth was upon her.

'My dear,' Mrs. Hesslegrave answered, her admiration for Kathleen's cleverness and power of self-restraint growing deeper each minute, 'you may set your mind at rest: you may rely upon my prudence. I grasp the situation. I couldn't have believed it, Kitty; but I'm very, very glad of it. What a wonderful girl you are! I declare you really almost take my breath away!'

And, indeed, Mrs. Hesslegrave felt it was most meritorious in Kathleen to have discovered the young man's rank so early—as of course she must have done—and to have succeeded in keeping her own counsel so well that even her mother never for a moment suspected the real rank of her lover; for that a lover he was, Mrs. Hesslegrave took for granted at once, now she knew the dreadful sailor-man was really an earl. She would hardly have given her Kathleen credit before for so much gumption.

As for Kathleen, she was so fully bent upon preserving Arnold Willoughby's secret, that she never even noticed her mother's misapprehension. Her one desire now was to keep the matter entirely from Canon Valentine, and, if possible, to prevent their accidentally meeting. And that she foresaw, would be no easy task; for of late, in spite of Mrs. Hesslegrave's marked coldness, Arnold had frequently called round on one errand or another with sketches or books at the lodgings by the Piazza.

Just as she was wondering how best to avert the misfortune of an unexpected encounter, however, Mrs. Hesslegrave observed with her blandest smile:

'We haven't seen much of Mr. Willoughby lately. I really think, Kathleen, I'll write this very day and invite him to come round to tea some afternoon while the Canon's with us.'

Kathleen stood aghast with horror. She quite understood Arnold Willoughby's motives now; with a flash of intuition, the minute she learned who he really was, she read at once the reasons for his strange behaviour. Something of the sort, indeed, had occurred to her as possible even before, when she contrasted the man's talk and wide range of information

with his supposed position in life; but now she knew who he was, it all burst at once upon her. And she had loved him as the common sailor; that she had never concealed from her own heart for many days, since the trip to the Lido. He could never say of her in future it was his rank and his artificial position in the world that had captivated her fancy. She loved him for himself; she knew it; she was certain of it! Had she not written it down in plain black and white in her diary? Yet if he were to find out now that she had discovered his true name—Kathleen trembled to herself as she thought of the possible result, for she was very much in love—he might never ask her. She wished in her heart he was really Arnold Willoughby, the sailor-painter, or that she had never discovered the truth as to his artificial position.

But something must be done at once to prevent this catastrophe which Mrs. Hesslegrave so innocently proposed to bring about. Kathleen seized her mother's arm with a nervous clutch.

'Mother,' she cried, much agitated, 'for worlds you mustn't write! for worlds you mustn't ask him! Oh, promise me you won't ask him! You don't know how much depends on it. For Heaven's sake, say you won't; say you'll do as I beg of you!'

Mrs. Hesslegrave, much puzzled as to what all this mystification and agitation could mean, yet drew back at once, and answered in perfect good faith:

'Oh, certainly, certainly, I'll do as you wish, dear; though I'm sure I don't know why. Such plot and counterplot is a great deal too deep for a poor simple old woman.'

Kathleen's heart sank at the words. They were only too true. She felt sure she could trust her

mother's good intentions implicitly; but she was by no means so certain she could trust her discretion.

'Though I've always said,' Mrs. Hesslegrave remarked in conclusion, 'he was really in his way a most charming person.'

CHAPTER XII.

A MOTHER'S DILEMMA.

Canon Valentine had intended to stop a week at Venice. He stopped just two days; and then, to Kathleen's secret joy and no small relief, bronchitis seized him. That stern monitor hurried him off incontinently to Florence. 'I'm sorry, Mrs. Hesslegrave,' he said; 'I can't tell you how sorry. I'd looked forward to seeing everything in this charming place under your daughter's guidance—she's a capital cicerone, I must say, your daughter; we *did* so enjoy going round the Grand Canal with her the day before yesterday. It's *so* delightful to see all these beautiful things in company with an artist! But the damp of the lagoons is really too much for my poor old throat; we're given to throat-trouble, you see; it's common to my cloth; and as I went along with Miss Hesslegrave to the Academy yesterday in an open gondola, I felt the cold air rise up bodily from the Canal and catch hold of me and throttle me. It took me just so, by the larynx, like a hand, and seemed to choke me instantly. "Amelia," said I at the time, "this chilly air has done for me." And, sure enough, I woke in the night with a tickle, tickle, tickle in my bronchial tubes, which I know means mischief.

When once that sets in, there's nothing for it but to leave the place where you are immediately. Change the air without delay: that's the one safe remedy. And indeed, to tell you the truth, Venice is so spoilt, so utterly spoilt, since the Austrians left it, that, except for you and Miss Hesslegrave, I must confess I shan't be sorry to get out of it. Most insanitary town, I call it—most insanitary in every way.'

Kathleen could hardly even pretend to regret their departure. During the last two days she had lived in instant dread that the Canon would somehow knock up against Arnold Willoughby. And if the truth must be told, it was the very same dread on the Canon's part, not bronchitis alone, that was driving him to Florence. For as they stood on the balcony of the Doges' Palace the day before, looking out upon the Riva and the busy quays and the panorama of the harbour, Canon Valentine beheld a man's back in the distance, rounding the corner by Danieli's, and he said to himself with a shudder: 'Axminster's back—or the devil's!' (Being an old-fashioned clergyman, the Canon, you will perceive, was not afraid of a very mild unparliamentary expression.) And the more convinced he became that the mysterious person thus flitting about Venice was really Lord Axminster, the more desirous did he grow to avoid the misfortune of actually meeting him. For if they met face to face, and caught one another's eyes, the Canon hardly knew how, for very shame, he could let Algy go on with his claim of right without informing him —which he was loath to do—that his cousin Bertie had never been drowned at all, but had been sighted in the flesh, and in sailor costume, in the city of Venice.

There are compromises we all make now and again with our consciences; and there are points where we feel the attempt at compromise becomes practically impossible. Now, the Canon was quite willing to give Algy and his wife the benefit of the doubt, as long as he felt only just morally certain that the person in the street with the trick of twisting his back hair was the last Lord Axminster. But if they met face to face, and he recognised his man without doubt, as he felt sure he must do when they came to close quarters, then the Canon felt in his heart he could no longer retain any grain of self-respect if he permitted the claim to be pushed through the House of Lords without even mentioning what he had seen to Algy. He might have kept silence, indeed, and let self-respect take its chance, if he met the man alone; but what on earth could he do if he met him, full front, while out walking with Amelia? That was the question. And I may remark parenthetically that most men feel keenly this necessity for preserving their self-respect before the face of their wives—which is a very important ally, indeed, to the cause of all the virtues.

So, on the third morning of his stay, the Canon left Venice. Kathleen breathed freer as soon as he was gone. The load of that gnawing anxiety was much lightened upon her.

That very same day, as it chanced, Arnold Willoughby, reflecting to himself in his own room, made his mind up suddenly to step round in the afternoon and have a word or two with Kathleen. Ever since that morning when they picnicked at the Lido, he had been debating with himself whether or not he should ask that beautiful soul to marry him; and

now his mind was made up; he could resist no longer: he had decided that very day to break the ice and ask her. He was quite sure she liked him—liked him very, very much: that she showed unequivocally: and he had waited so long only because he couldn't muster up courage to speak to her. Would it be right of him, he asked himself, to expect that any woman should share such fortunes as his would henceforth be? Was he justified in begging any woman to wait till an obscure young painter could earn money enough to keep her in the comfort and luxury to which she had been accustomed?

He put that question to himself seriously; and he answered it in the affirmative. If he had really been always the Arnold Willoughby he had now made himself by his own act, he need never have doubted. Any young man, just starting in life, would have thought himself justified in asking the girl he loved best in the world to wait for him till he was in a position to marry her. Why should not he do what any other man might do lawfully? He had cast the past behind him; he was a painter sailor now; but why need he hesitate on that account to ask the girl whose love he believed he had won on his own merits if she would wait till he could marry her? Arnold Willoughby would have done it; and he *was* Arnold Willoughby.

So, about three o'clock, he went round, somewhat tremulous, in the direction of the Piazza. He hadn't seen Kathleen for a day or two; she had told him friends would be visiting them, without mentioning their name; and she had given herself a holiday, while the friends were with her, from her accustomed work on the Fondamenta della Zattere.

When he got to the door, Francesca, who opened it, told him, with a sunny display of two rows of white teeth, that the signorina was out, but the signora was at home, if he would care to see her.

Much disappointed, Arnold went up, anxious to learn whether any chance still remained that, later in the afternoon, he might have a word or two with Kathleen. To his immense surprise, the moment he entered, Mrs. Hesslegrave rose from her seat with obvious warmth, and held out her hand to greet him in her most gracious manner. Arnold had noticed by this time the seven distinct gradations of cordiality with which Mrs. Hesslegrave was accustomed to receive her various guests in accordance with their respective and relative positions in the table of precedence as by authority established. This afternoon, therefore, he couldn't help observing her manner was that with which she was wont to welcome peers of the realm and foreign ambassadors. To say the truth, Mrs. Hesslegrave considerably overdid it in the matter of graciousness. There was an inartistic abruptness in her sudden change of front, a practical inconsistency in her view of his status, which couldn't fail to strike him. The instant way in which Mrs. Hesslegrave, who had hitherto taken little pains to conceal her dislike and distrust of the dreadful sailor man, flung herself visibly at his head, made Arnold at once suspect some radical revolution must have taken place meanwhile in her views as to his position.

'Why, Mr. Willoughby,' she cried, holding his hand in her own much longer than was strictly necessary for the purpose of shaking it, 'what a stranger you are, to be sure! You never come near us now. It's really quite unfriendly of you. Kathleen was

saying this morning we must write round to your chambers and ask you to dine with us. And *she* hasn't seen you for the last day or two on the Zattere, either! Poor child! she's been so occupied. We've had some friends here, who've been taking up all our time. Kitty's been out in a gondola all day long with them. However, that's all over, and she hopes to get to work again on the quay to-morrow—she's so anxious to go on with her Spire and Canal; wrapped up in her art, dear girl—you know, it's all she lives for. However, she'll be back at it, I'm glad to say, at the old place, in the morning. Our friends are just gone—couldn't stand the climate—said it gave them sore throats—and Kathleen's gone off to say good-bye to them at the station.'

'That's fortunate,' Arnold answered a little stiffly, feeling, somehow, a dim consciousness that, against his will, he was once more a lord, and lapsing for the moment into his early bad habit of society small-talk. 'For the lights on the Canal have been lovely the last three days, and I've regretted so much Miss Hesslegrave should have missed them.'

'Not more than *she* has, I'm sure,' Mrs. Hesslegrave went on, quite archly, with her blandest smile—'mother's society smirk,' as that irreverent boy Reggie was wont to term it. 'I don't know why, I'm sure, Mr. Willoughby, but Kathleen has enjoyed her painting on the quay this winter and spring a great deal more than she ever before enjoyed it. It's been a perfect treat to her. She says she can't bear to be away for one day from that dear old San Trovaso. She just loves her work; and I assure you she seemed almost sentimentally sad because these friends who've been stopping with us kept her away so long from her beloved picture.—And

from her fellow-artists,' Mrs. Hesslegrave added after a pause, in some little trepidation, uncertain whether that last phrase might not go just one step too far in the right direction.

Arnold Willoughby eyed her closely. All his dearest suspicions were being fast aroused; he began to tremble in his heart lest somebody had managed to pierce the close disguise with which he had so carefully and so long surrounded himself.

'Will Miss Hesslegrave be back by-and-by?' he asked in a coldly official tone. 'Because, if she will, I should like to stop and see her.'

Mrs. Hesslegrave jumped at the chance with unwise avidity. This was the very first time, in fact, that Arnold Willoughby had ever asked to see her daughter in so many words. She scented a proposal.

'Oh yes,' she answered, acquiescent, with obvious eagerness, though she plumed herself inwardly as she spoke upon her own bland ingenuity; 'Kathleen will be back by-and-by from the station, and will be delighted to see you. I know there's some point in that last year's picture she's touching up that she said she wanted to consult you about, if possible. I shall have to go out myself at four, unfortunately—I'm engaged to an "at home" at dear Lady Devonport's; but I dare say Kathleen can give you a cup of tea here; and no doubt you and she can make yourselves happy together.'

She beamed as she said it. The appointment with Lady Devonport was a myth, to be sure; but Mrs. Hesslegrave thought it would be wise, under the circumstances, to leave the young people alone with one another. Arnold Willoughby's suspicions grew deeper and deeper. Mrs. Hesslegrave was one of

those transparent people whose little deceptions are painfully obvious; he could see at half a glance something must have occurred which gave her all at once a much more favourable view of him. He measured her doubtfully with his eye. Mrs. Hesslegrave in return showered her sweetest smile upon him. She was all obsequiousness. Then she began to talk with ostentatious motherly pride about Kathleen. She was *such* a good girl! Few mothers had a comfort like that in their daughters. The only thing Mrs. Hesslegrave couldn't bear was the distressing thought that sooner or later Kathleen must some day leave her. That *would* be a trial. But there! no mother can expect to keep her daughter always by her side: it would be selfish, wouldn't it?—and Kathleen was adapted to make a good man so supremely happy. And then Mrs. Hesslegrave, leaning forward in her chair, grew almost confidential. Had Mr. Willoughby noticed that Mr. Mortimer, the rich young American, thought so much of Kathleen? Well, he certainly did; he quite haunted the house; though Mrs. Hesslegrave believed in her heart of hearts Kathleen didn't really care one bit for him. And she was a girl of such high principle—such very high principle! Unless she truly loved a man—was fascinated, absorbed in him—she never would marry him, though he were as rich as Crœsus. Kathleen meant to come back by the Zattere, she believed; and she knew Mr. Mortimer would be waiting there to see her; he always hung about and waited to see her everywhere. But Kathleen was such a romantic, poetical-minded girl! She would rather take the man of her choice, Mrs. Hesslegrave believed—with an impressive nod of the coffee-coloured Honiton head-dress—than

marry the heir to all the estates in England, if he didn't happen to please her fancy.

As she maundered on, floundering further into the mire each moment, Arnold Willoughby's conviction that something had gone wrong grew deeper and deeper with every sentence. He shuffled uneasily on his chair. For the first time since he had practically ceased to be an Earl, he saw a British mamma quite obviously paying court to him. He would have liked to go, indeed, this queer talk made him feel so awkward and uncomfortable; it reminded him of the days when adulation was his bane: more still, it jarred against his sense of maternal dignity. But he couldn't go, somehow. Now the doubt was once aroused, he must wait at least till Kathleen returned —that he might see her, and be rid of it. Yet all this strange dangling of inartistically-wrought flies before the victim's eye was disagreeably familiar to him. He had heard a round dozen of Mayfair mammas talk so to him of their daughters, and always in the same pretended confidential strain, when he was an Earl and a catch in London society; though he confessed to himself with a shudder that he had never yet heard anybody do it quite so fatuously, transparently, and woodenly as Kathleen's mother. She, poor soul! went on with bland self-satisfaction, convinced in her own soul she was making the running for Kathleen in the most masterly fashion, and utterly unaware of the disgust she was rousing in Arnold Willoughby's distracted bosom.

At last, Arnold's suspicions could no longer be concealed. The deeper Mrs. Hesslegrave probed, the more firmly convinced did her patient become that

she had somehow surprised his inmost secret, and was trying all she knew to capture him for Kathleen; and trying most ineptly. This sudden change of front from her attitude of sullen non-recognition to one of ardent sycophancy roused all his bitterest and most cynical feelings. Was this day-dream, then, doomed to fade as his earlier one had faded? Was Kathleen, the sweet Kathleen he had invested to himself in his fervid fancy with all the innocent virtues, to crush his heart a second time as Lady Sark had once crushed it? Was she, too, a self-seeker? Did she know who he was, and what title he bore? Was she allowing him to make love to her for his money (such as it was) and his earldom?

With a sudden resolve, he determined to put the question to the proof forthwith. He knew Mrs. Hesslegrave well enough to know she could never control her face or her emotions. Whatever passed within, that quick countenance betrayed to the most casual observer. So, at a pause in the conversation (when Mrs. Hesslegrave was just engaged in wondering to herself what would be a good fresh subject to start next with an Earl in disguise whom you desired to captivate), Arnold turned round to her sharply, and asked with a rapid swoop, which fairly took her off her guard: 'Have you seen the English papers? Do you know what's being done in this Axminster peerage case?'

It was a bold stroke of policy; but it committed him to nothing, for the subject was a common one, and it was justified by the result. Mrs. Hesslegrave, full herself of this very theme, looked up at him in astonishment, hardly knowing how to take it. She gave a little start, and trembled quite visibly. In

her perplexity, indeed, she clapped her hand to her mouth, as one will often do when the last subject on earth one expected to hear broached is suddenly sprung upon one. The movement was unmistakable. So was the frightened and hesitating way in which Mrs. Hesslegrave responded as quickly as she could: 'Oh yes—that is to say, no—well, we haven't seen much about it. But—the young man's dead, of course—or, do you think he's living? I mean—well, really, it's so difficult, don't you know, in such a perplexing case, to make one's mind up about it.'

She drew out her handkerchief and wiped her forehead in her confusion. She would have given ten pounds that moment to have Kathleen by her side to prompt and instruct her. Arnold Willoughby preserved a face of sphinx-like indifference. How dreadful that he should have boarded her with that difficult and dangerous subject! What would Kathleen wish her to do? Ought she to pretend to ignore it all, or did he mean her to recognise him?

'Is he dead or living? Which do you think?' Arnold asked again, gazing hard at her.

Mrs. Hesslegrave quailed. It was a trying moment. People oughtn't to lay such traps for poor innocent old women, whose only desire, after all, is the perfectly natural one to see their daughters well and creditably married. She looked back at her questioner with a very frightened air.

'Well, of course, *you* know,' she faltered out, with a glimmering perception of the fact that she was irrevocably committing herself to a dangerous position. 'If it comes to that, you must know better than anyone.'

'Why so?' Arnold Willoughby persisted. He

wasn't going to say a word either way to compromise his own incognito; but he was determined to find out just exactly how much Mrs. Hesslegrave knew about the matter of his identity.

Mrs. Hesslegrave gazed up at him with tears rising fast in her poor puzzled eyes.

'Oh, what shall I do?' she cried, wringing her hands in her misery and perplexity. 'How cruel you are to try me so! What ought I to answer? I'm afraid Kathleen will be so dreadfully angry with me.'

'Why angry?' Arnold Willoughby asked once more, his heart growing like a stone within him as he spoke. Then, the worst was true. This was a deliberate conspiracy.

'Because,' Mrs. Hesslegrave blurted out, 'Kathleen told me I wasn't on any account to mention a word of all this to you or to anybody. She told me that was imperative. She said it would spoil all—those were her very words; she said it would spoil all; and she begged me not to mention it. And now I'm afraid I *have* spoiled all! Oh, Mr. Willoughby — Lord Axminster, I mean—for Heaven's sake, don't be angry with me. Don't say I've spoiled all! Don't say so! Don't reproach me with it!'

'That you certainly have,' Arnold answered with disdain, growing colder and visibly colder each moment. 'You've spoiled more than you know—two lives that might otherwise perhaps have been happy. And yet—it's best so. Better wake up to it now than wake up to it—afterwards. Miss Hesslegrave has been less wise and circumspect in this matter, though, than in the rest of her conduct. She took me in completely. And if she hadn't been so ill-advised as to

confide her conclusions and suspicions to *you*, why, she might very likely have taken me in for ever. As it is, this *éclaircissement* has come in good time. No harm has yet been done. No word has yet passed. An hour or two later, the result, I dare say, might have been far more serious.'

'She *didn't* tell me,' Mrs. Hesslegrave burst out, anxious, now the worst had come, to make things easier for Kathleen, and to retrieve her failure. 'It wasn't *she* who told me. I found it out for myself—that is, through somebody else——'

'Found out *what?*' Arnold asked coldly, fixing his eye upon hers with a stony glare.

Mrs. Hesslegrave looked away from him in abject terror. That glance of his froze her.

'Why, found out that you were Lord Axminster,' she answered with one burst, not knowing what to make of him. '*She* knew it all along, you know; but she never told me or betrayed your secret. She never even mentioned it to *me*, her mother. She kept it quite faithfully. She was ever so wise about it. I couldn't imagine why she—well, took so much notice of a man I supposed to be nothing but a common sailor; and it was only yesterday, or the day before, I discovered by accident she had known it all along, and had recognised the born gentleman under all disguises.'

Mrs. Hesslegrave thought that last was a trump card to play on Kathleen's behalf. But Arnold Willoughby rose.

'Well, you may tell Miss Hesslegrave,' he said stiffly, 'that if she thought she was going to marry an English Earl, and live like a Countess, she was very much mistaken. That was wholly an error.

The man who loved her till ten minutes ago—the man she seemed to love—the man who, thinking she loved him, came here to ask for her hand this very afternoon, and whom she would no doubt have accepted under that painful misapprehension—*is* and means to remain a common sailor. She has made a mistake—that's all. She has miscalculated her chances. It's fortunate, on the whole, that mistake and miscalculation have gone no farther. If I had married her under the misapprehension which seems to have occurred, she might have had in the end a very bitter awakening. Such a misfortune has been averted by your lucky indiscretion. You may say good-bye for me to Miss Hesslegrave when she returns. It is not my intention now to remain any longer in Venice.'

'But you'll stop and see Kathleen!' Mrs. Hesslegrave exclaimed, awe-struck.

'No, thank you,' Arnold answered, taking his hat in his hand. 'What you tell me is quite enough. It is my earnest wish, after the error that has occurred, never as long as I live to set eyes on her again. You may give her that message. You have, indeed, *spoiled all.* It is she herself who said it!'

CHAPTER XIII.

A MISSING LOVER.

'Twas in bitter disappointment that Arnold Willoughby strode away from the Hesslegraves' door that afternoon in Venice. For the second time in his life his day-dream had vanished. And the new bubble had burst

even more painfully than the old one. He was young, he said to himself, when he fell in love with Blanche Middleton. With a boy's simplicity, he mistook the mere blushing awkwardness and uncertainty of the *ingénue* for innocence of mind and purity of purpose. He had a rude awakening when he saw Lady Sark sell herself for money and title, and develop into one of the vainest and showiest among the heartless clan of professional beauties. But this time, he had said to his own heart, he was older and wiser. No such hasty mistakes for him nowadays! He knew the difference now between the awkward bashfulness of the frightened school-girl and the pure white integrity of a noble-minded woman. Bit by bit, Kathleen Hesslegrave had won back the soured misogynist to a belief in her sex, in its goodness, in its unselfishness, in its nobility of nature. He knew she could have married Rufus Mortimer if she wished; but he believed she had refused him for the penniless sailor's sake. It was because he believed her capable of real disinterested affection like that, that he had fallen in love with Kathleen Hesslegrave.

And now, what a disillusion! He found he had been mistaken in her from the very beginning. The woman whom he had thought so far raised above her fellows that she could love a struggling artist, without past, without future, for his own sake alone, turned out, after all, to be an intriguer, more calculating and more deceitful in her way than Lady Sark herself had been. Kathleen must have known from the beginning that the man whose advances she had accepted with so much blushing uncertainty and with such pretty coyness was really Lord Axminster. She had been saying those sweet things, about respecting

him so much and not caring for rank or wealth or position, because she thought that was the way that would lead her to a coronet. With incredible cunning and deceptiveness, she had managed to hide from him her knowledge of his original position, and to assume a sort of instinctive shrinking from his lowly calling, which she allowed her love and respect to overcome, as it were, quite visibly before his eyes, with consummate cleverness. As a piece of fine acting in real life it was nothing short of admirable. If that girl were to go upon the stage now, Arnold said to himself bitterly, she would make her fortune. Those modest side-glances; those dexterously summoned blushes; that timid demeanour at first, giving way with fuller acquaintance to an uncontrollable affection, so strong that it compelled her, against her will, as it seemed, to overlook the prejudices of birth, and to forget the immense gulf in artificial position—oh, as acting it was marvellous! But to think it was only that!

Arnold Willoughby's brain reeled. Ah, why could he never cast this birthright of false adulation and vile sycophancy behind him? Why could he never stand out before the world on his merits as a man, and be accepted or rejected for himself alone, without the intervention of this perpetual reference to his artificial value and his place in the peerage?

And the secrecy of it, too! The baseness! The privy planning and plotting! Why, this woman, whom he imagined all frankness and candour, with a heart as straightforward as that open brave face of hers, had concocted this vile trap to catch a coronet unawares, all by herself, unaided, and had concealed her inmost thoughts from her own mother even. There was a cold-blooded deliberateness about it all

which disgusted and disillusioned Arnold Willoughby on the first blush of it. He had gone into that house that afternoon in a lover's fever and with a lover's fervour, saying to himself as he crossed the threshold:

'There is none like her, none; I shall ask her this very day; I could risk my life for her with joy; I could stake my existence on her goodness and purity!'

And now—he came out of it coldly numb and critical. He hated to think he had been so readily deceived by a clever woman's wiles. He hated and despised himself. Never again while he lived would he trust a single one of them. Their most innocent smile hides their blackest treachery.

It's a way men have, when they are out of conceit for a time with their wives or their sweethearts.

As for poor Mrs. Hesslegrave, the unoffending cause of all this lamentable misapprehension, she sat by herself, meanwhile, wringing her hands in impotent despair, in her own drawing-room, and wondering when Kathleen would come in to comfort her. Each minute seemed an hour. What could be keeping Kathleen? As a rule, the dear child came back so soon from such errands as this to her beloved work; for Kathleen was never so happy as when painting or sketching; and she wrought with a will, both for love's sake and money's. But to-day she was somehow unaccountably delayed. Her stars were unpropitious. And the real cause of the delay, as fate would have it, was one of those petty circumstances upon which our lives all hinge. She had gone round on her way home by the Fondamenta delle Zattere as a woman in love will do, expecting to find Arnold Willoughby at work on his canvas there, and hoping

to seem as if mere accident had brought her back to the place she had abandoned during the Valentines' visit. Three days was so long a time to go without seeing Arnold! But instead of finding him, she had fallen in with Rufus Mortimer, engaged upon his christening scene; and Mortimer, guessing her object, and generously anxious, as was his nature, to aid her in her love affair, had kept her talking long in front of the picture he was painting, under the belief that Arnold would shortly turn up, and that he was doing her a kindness by thus making her presence there seem more natural and less open to misconstruction.

Yet, as often happens in this world of mischance, Mortimer's very anxiety to help her defeated his own purpose. It was the kind-hearted young American's fate in life to do as much harm by his well-intentioned efforts as many worse natures do by their deliberate malice.

Into this unconscious trap Kathleen fell readily enough, and waited on as long as she could, in the vain hope that Arnold Willoughby would turn up sooner or later. But when at last it seemed clear that he was taking an afternoon off, and wouldn't be there at all, she accepted Mortimer's offer of a lift home in his gondola, and, having wasted her day hopelessly by this time, went in on her way back to fulfil a few small commissions at shops in the Calle San Moise, which still further delayed her return to her mother's.

When she reached home and went upstairs she was astonished to find Mrs. Hesslegrave rocking herself up and down distractedly in her chair, and the yellow Honiton head-dress in a last stage of disorder, which betokened a long spell of very vigorous misery. 'Why,

mother dear,' she cried in alarm, 'what has happened since I went out? You haven't had another letter from Reggie, asking for money, have you?'

Mrs. Hesslegrave broke down.

'I wish I had,' she answered, sobbing. 'I wish it was only that! I wish it was Reggie! Oh, Kitty, Kitty, Kitty, how am I ever to tell you? He's been here since you went out. And you'll never, never forgive me.'

'He's been here?' Kathleen repeated, not knowing what her mother could mean. 'Reggie's been here? To-day? Not at this house—in Venice!'

'No, no, no! not Reggie,' Mrs. Hesslegrave answered, rocking herself up and down still more vigorously than before. 'Mr. Willoughby—Lord Axminster.'

In a second the colour fled from Kathleen's cheek as if by magic. Her heart grew cold. She trembled all over.

'Mr. Willoughby!' she cried, clasping her bloodless hands. Every nerve in her body quivered. Never till that moment did she know how far her love had carried her. 'Oh, mother, what did you say? What did he do? What has happened?'

'He's gone!' Mrs. Hesslegrave cried feebly, wringing her hands in her distress. 'He's gone for good and all. He told me to say good-bye to you.'

'Good-bye!' Kathleen echoed, horror-struck. 'Good-bye! Oh, mother! Where's he going, then? What can it mean? This is very, very sudden.'

'I don't know,' Mrs. Hesslegrave answered, bursting afresh into tears. 'But he said I'd spoiled all. He said so more than once. And he told me it was you yourself who said so.'

For a minute or two Kathleen was too agitated even to inquire in any intelligent way what exactly had happened. Just at first, all she knew was a vague consciousness of fate, a sense that some terrible blow had fallen upon her. Her mother had committed some fatal indiscretion; and Arnold was gone—gone, without an explanation! But slowly, as she thought of it all, it began to dawn upon her what must have happened. With a fearful sinking at heart, she hardened herself for the effort, and drew slowly from the reluctant and penitent Mrs. Hesslegrave a full and complete confession of her share in this misfortune. Bit by bit, Mrs. Hesslegrave allowed the whole painful and humiliating scene to be wrung out of her, piecemeal. As soon as she had finished, Kathleen stood up and faced her. She did not reproach her mother; the wound had gone too deep by far for reproach; but her very silence was more terrible to Mrs. Hesslegrave than any number of reproaches.

'I must go, mother,' she cried, breaking away from her like some wild and wounded creature; 'I must go at once and see him. This cruel misapprehension is more than I can endure. I didn't know who he was till Canon Valentine told us. I fell in love with him for himself, as a common sailor; I never knew he was Lord Axminster. I must go and tell him so!'

Mrs. Hesslegrave's sense of propriety was severely outraged. Not only was it dreadful to think that a young lady could have fallen in love with a man unasked, and that man, too, a common sailor; but it was dreadful also that Kathleen should dream of going to see him in person, instead of writing to explain to

him, and asking him to call round for the further clearing up of this painful entanglement.

'Oh, my dear,' she cried, drawing back, 'you're not surely going to call for him! It would look so bad! Do you think it would be right? Do you think it would be womanly?'

'Yes, I do!' Kathleen answered with unwonted boldness. 'Right and womanly to the last degree. Most right and most womanly. Mother dear, I don't blame you; you did what you thought best in my interest, as you imagined; but you have left him under a cruel misapprehension of my character and motives—a misapprehension that would be dreadful for me to bear with anyone, but ten thousand times worse with a nature like Arnold Willoughby's; and I can't sit down under it. I can't rest till I've seen him and told him how utterly mistaken he is about me. There's no turning back now. I must and shall see him.'

And in her own heart she said to herself a great deal more than that—'I must and shall marry him.'

So, with face on fire and eager steps that never paused, she rushed hotly down the stairs and out into the Piazza. The pigeons crowded round her as if nothing had happened. Thence she took the narrow lane that led most directly, by many bridges, to the little salt-fish shop, and went to make her first call on the man of her choice at his own lodgings.

Little Cecca was at the door, playing with a big new doll. She looked up with a smile at the beautiful lady, whom she recognised as the person she had seen out walking one day with 'our Inglese.'

'Is the signore at home?' Kathleen asked, too deeply moved to return the child's smile, yet touching her golden head gently.

The little one looked up at her again with all the saucy southern confidingness. 'No, he isn't,' she answered, dimpling. 'The signore's gone away; but he gave me two lire before he went, don't you see, and I bought this pretty doll with it, at neighbour Giacomo's. Isn't it a pretty one? And it cost all two lire.'

'Gone away?' Kathleen echoed, a cold thrill coming over her. 'Gone away? Not from Venice?'

The child nodded and puffed out her lips.

'Sì, sì,' she said, 'from Venice.' And then she went on singing in her childish nursery rhyme:

'Vate a far una barca o una batela;
Co ti l'a fata, butila in mar;
La ti condurra in Venezia bela.'

'But he hasn't done that,' she added in her baby-like prattle. 'He's taken his boat and gone away from Venice; away from Venice; from Venezia bela; right away, right away from Venezia bela.'

Kathleen stood for a moment reeling. The child's words unnerved her. She had hard work to restrain herself from fainting then and there. A terrible weakness seemed to break over her suddenly. Gone! and with that fatal misapprehension on his mind. Oh, it was too, too cruel. She staggered into the shop. With an effort she burst out:

'The signore, your lodger—the Inglese—Signor Willoughby?'

A large young woman of the florid Venetian type, broad of face and yellow of hair, like a vulgarized Titian, was sitting behind the counter knitting away at a coloured head-dress: she nodded and looked grave. Like all Italians, she instantly suspected a

love-tragedy, of the kind with which she herself was familiar.

'Is gone!' she assented in a really sympathetic tone. 'Sì, sì, is gone, signora. The little one says the truth. Is gone this very evening.'

'But where?' Kathleen cried, refraining with a struggle from wringing her poor hands, and repressing the rising tears before the stranger's face with visible difficulty.

The bountiful-looking Italian woman spread her hands open by her side with a demonstrative air.

'Who knows?' she answered placidly. ''Tis the way with these seafarers. A *bella ragazza* in every port, they say; one here, one there; one in Venice, one in London—and perhaps, for all we know, one in Buenos Ayres, Calcutta, Rio.—But he may write to you, signora! He may come back again to Italy!'

Kathleen shook her head sadly. Much as the woman misunderstood the situation, reading into it the ideas and habits of her own class and country, Kathleen felt she meant to be kind, and was grateful for even that mechanical kindness at such a terrible moment.

'He will *not* return,' she answered despairingly, with a terrible quiver in her voice. 'But it wasn't that I wanted. I wanted to speak with him before he went, and—and to clear up a misconception.—Which way has he gone, do you know? By sea or by land? The port or the railway-station?'

There was time even yet; for at that moment, as it chanced, Arnold Willoughby was still engaged in registering his luggage for Genoa, whence he hoped to get employment on some homeward-bound steamer. And if the woman had told the truth, much trouble

would have been averted. But truth is an article of luxury in Italy. The vulgarized Titian looked at Kathleen searchingly, yet with a pitying glance.

'Oh, he's gone,' she answered, nodding her head; 'he's gone altogether. He got out his box and his pictures quite suddenly just now; and our Pietro rowed him off to a steamer in the harbour. And I saw the steamer sail; she's at the Lido by this time. But he'll write; he'll write, make sure! Don't take it to heart, signora.'

Kathleen pressed her hand to her bosom, to still its throbbing, and went forth into the street. All was black as night for her. She staggered home in a maze. Her head reeled unspeakably. But as soon as she was gone, the woman turned to a man who lounged among the packing-cases at the back of the shop, with a smile of triumph.

'He was a good fellow,' she said, with true Southern tolerance, 'and I wasn't going to tell her he'd gone by train to Genoa. Not likely I should! You know what she wanted? She would have stuck a knife into him. I saw it in her eye, and, aha! I prevented it. But sailors *will* be sailors; and, Signor Villabi, say I, was always a pleasant one. Why should I wish him harm? He liked little Cecca, and paid his bill punctually. She's not the first signora, we all know well, who has been deceived and deserted by a good-looking sailor. But what would you have? 'Tis the way of them! Mariners, mariners—like the gulls of Marano! Here to-day, and there to-morrow!'

CHAPTER XIV.

THE AXMINSTER PEERAGE.

At Genoa, as luck would have it, Arnold Willoughby found a place on a homeward-bound brigantine direct for London. That was all he wanted. He craved for action. He was a sailor once more, and had cast art behind him. No more dalliance with the luxurious muse of painting. In the daily drudgery of the sea, in the teeth of the wind, he would try to forget his bitter disappointment. Hard work and dog-watches might suffice to cauterize the raw surface of the wound Kathleen Hesslegrave had unwillingly and unwittingly inflicted.

He did wrong to fly from her, of course, without giving her at least the chance of an explanation; but, then, that was exactly Arnold Willoughby's nature. He would have been other than himself if he had not so acted. Extreme modifiability was the keynote of his character. The self-same impulse which had made him in the first instance sink name and individuality at a moment's notice, in order to become a new man and a common sailor, made him also in the second instance rush at once to the conclusion that he had been basely deceived, and drove him to remodel, without a second's delay, his whole scheme of life and activity for the future. Half gentleman, half gipsy, he was a man of principle, and yet a creature of impulse. The instant he found his plans going hopelessly wrong, he was ready to alter them off-hand with drastic severity.

And yet, he said to himself, it was never his ow

individuality he got rid of at all. That alone persisted. All these changes and disguises were forced upon him, indeed, by the difficulty of realizing his own inner personality in a world which insisted on accepting him as an Earl, instead of reckoning him up, as he wished, at his intrinsic value as a human being. That intrinsic value Arnold Willoughby was determined to discover and appraise, no matter at what cost of trouble and disillusion; his naked worth as a man among men was the only kind of worth he cared one jot or tittle to realize.

When he reached London, therefore, he decided to see what steps were being taken in the vexed question of the Axminster peerage, before he engaged for a longer voyage to the Northern seas, which he liked best to sail in bracing summer weather. So, on the very afternoon of his discharge from the brigantine, where he had signed for the single voyage only, he walked into a coffee-house on the river bank, and invested a ha'penny in an evening paper. He was not long in coming upon the item he wanted: 'Axminster Peerage Case.—This afternoon, the House of Lords will deliver judgment upon the claim of Algernon Loftus Redburn, eldest son of the late Honourable Algernon Redburn, of Musbury, Devonshire, to the Earldom of Axminster. The case is a romantic one. It will be remembered that the seventh Earl, who was a person of most eccentric habits and ideas, closely bordering upon insanity, disappeared without warning from London society'—and so forth, and so forth.

Arnold set down the paper, with a deeper curl than usual at the corner of his genial mouth. It 'bordered on insanity,' of course, for a born gentleman, who might have spent his time in dining, calling, shooting

grouse, and running racehorses, to determine upon doing some useful work in the world! So very undignified! Arnold was quite familiar by this time with that curious point of view; 'tis the point of view of nine-tenths of the world in this United Kingdom; but none the less, every time he saw it solemnly committed to print, it amused him afresh by its utter incongruity. The contrast between the reality and the grasp of life he obtained in his chosen vocation of sailor, with the shadowy superficiality of the existence he had led in the days when he was still Lord Axminster, made such criticism seem to him rather childish than unkindly.

He made up his mind at once. He would go down to the House and see them play this little farce out. He would be present to hear whether, on the authority of the highest court in the realm, he was dead or living. He would watch the last irrevocable nail being knocked into his coffin as Earl of Axminster, and would emerge with the certainty that some other man now bore the title which once was his, and that he was legally defunct by decision of Parliament.

Go down to the House! Then a little laugh seized him. He was thinking of it to himself as he used to think in the days when he had but to order his carriage and drive down from Eaton Place to the precincts of Westminster. What chance would there be for a sailor in his seaman's dress to get into the House by mere asking for a place? Not much, he confessed to himself. However, he would try. There was something that pleased him in the idea of the bare chance that he might be turned back from the doors of the Chamber to which he hereditarily belonged on the day when he was to be declared no longer living.

It would be funny if the Lords refused to let him hear them pronounce their decision of his own death; funnier still if they solemnly declared him dead in his living presence.

So he walked by St. Paul's and the Embankment to Westminster, and presented himself at that well-known door where once—nay, where still—he had, by law and descent, the right of entry. It was a private business day, he knew, and their lordships would only be sitting as a committee of privilege; in other words, half a dozen law lords would have come down sleepily, as a matter of duty, to decide the vexed question of the peerage before them. On such occasions, the Strangers' Gallery is never at all full; and Arnold hoped he might be lucky enough to corrupt by his eloquence the virtue of the under door-keeper. The door-keeper, however, was absolutely incorruptible—except, of course, by gold, which was too rare an object now for Arnold to bestow upon him lightly.

'I don't know all the peers by sight,' the official said with some contempt, surveying the new-comer from head to foot; 'there's peers from the country that turn up now and again when there's important bills on, that you wouldn't know from farmers. Times like that, we let any gentleman in who's dressed *as* such, and who says he's a Markis. But *you* ain't a peer, anyhow; you ain't got the cut of it. Nor you don't much look like a Distinguished Stranger.'

And the door-keeper laughed heartily at his own humour.

Arnold laughed in turn, and walked away disconsolate. He was just on the point of giving up the attempt in despair, when he saw an old law lord enter,

whom he knew well by sight as a judge of appeal, and who had the reputation of being a good-humoured and accessible person. Arnold boarded him at once with a polite request for a pass to the gallery. The old peer looked at him in surprise.

'Are you interested in the case?' he asked, seeing the sailor's garb and the weather-beaten features.

Arnold answered with truth:

'Well, I know something of the man they called Douglas Overton.'

Lord Helvellyn (for it was he) scanned the bronzed face again with some show of interest.

'You were a ship-fellow?' he asked.

And Arnold, without remembering how much the admission implied, made answer with truth once more:

'Yes—at least—that is to say—I sailed in the *Saucy Sally*.'

The old peer smiled acquiescence, and waved him to follow to the door of the waiting-room. Arnold did so, somewhat amused at the condescending air of the new-made peer to his hereditary companion. In the House of Lords he couldn't, somehow, altogether forget his traditions.

'Pass this man to the gallery,' the old law lord said with a nod of command to the door-keeper.

The door-keeper bowed low, and Arnold Willoughby followed him.

The proceedings in the House were short and purely formal. The Committee, represented by one half-blind old gentleman, read their report of privilege in a mumbling tone; but Arnold could see its decision was awaited with the utmost interest by his cousin Algy, who, as claimant to the seat, stood at the bar of

the House awaiting judgment. The Committee found that Albert Ogilvie Redburn, seventh Earl of Axminster, was actually dead; that his identity with the person who sailed in the *Saucy Sally* from Liverpool for Melbourne under the assumed name of Douglas Overton had been duly proved to their satisfaction; that the *Saucy Sally* had been lost, as alleged, in the Indian Ocean, and that all souls on board had really perished; that amongst the persons so lost was Albert Ogilvie Redburn, *alias* Douglas Overton, seventh Earl of Axminster; that Algernon Loftus Redburn, eldest son of the Honourable Algernon Redburn, deceased, and grandson of the fifth Earl, was the heir to the peerage; and that this house admitted his claim of right, and humbly prayed Her Majesty to issue her gracious writ summoning him as a Peer of Parliament accordingly.

Algernon Redburn, below, smiled a smile of triumph. But Arnold Willoughby, in the gallery, felt a little shudder pass over him. It was no wonder, indeed. He had ceased to exist legally. He was no longer his own original self, but in very deed a common sailor. He knew that the estates must follow the title; from that day forth he was a beggar, a nameless nobody. Till the report was read, he might have stood forth at any moment and claimed his ancestral name and his ancestral acres. Now the die was cast. He felt that after he had once stood by as he had stood by that day and allowed himself to be solemnly adjudicated as dead, he could never again allow himself to be resurrected. He should have spoken then, or must for ever keep silent. It would be wrong of him, cruel of him, cowardly of him, unmanly of him, to let Algy and Algy's wife take his place in the world, with his

full knowledge and assent, and then come forward later to deprive them of their privilege. He was now nothing more than 'the late Lord Axminster.' That at least was his past; his future would be spent as mere Arnold Willoughby.

Had Kathleen proved different, he hardly knew whether, at the last moment, he might not have turned suddenly round and refused so completely to burn his boats; but as it was, he was glad of it. The tie to his old life, which laid him open to such cruel disillusions as Kathleen had provided for him, was now broken for ever; henceforth he would be valued at his own worth alone by all and sundry.

But no more of women! If Arnold Willoughby had been a confirmed misogynist before he met Kathleen Hesslegrave by accident at the Academy doors, he was a thousand times more so after this terrible reaction from his temporary backsliding into respectable society.

He went down into the corridor, and saw Algy surrounded by a whole group of younger peers, who were now strolling in for the afternoon's business. They were warmly congratulating him upon having secured the doubtful privileges of which Arnold for his part had been so anxious to divest himself. Arnold was not afraid to pass quite near them. Use had accustomed him to the ordeal of scrutiny. For some years, he had passed by hundreds who once knew him, in London streets or Continental towns, and yet, with the solitary exception of the Hesslegraves (for he did not know the part borne in his recognition by the Valentines), not a soul had ever pierced the successful disguise with which he had surrounded himself. A few years before, the same men would have crowded

just as eagerly round the seventh as round the eighth Earl; and now, not a word of the last holder of the title; nothing but congratulation for the man who had supplanted him, and who stood that moment, smiling and radiant, the centre of a little group of friendly acquaintances.

As Arnold paused, half irresolute, near the doors of the House, a voice that he knew well called out suddenly:

'Hullo, Axminster, there you are! I've been looking for you everywhere.'

Arnold turned half round in surprise. What an unseasonable interruption! How dreadful that at this moment somebody should have recognised him! And from behind, too—that was the worst—for the speaker was invisible. Arnold hesitated whether or not to run away without answering him; then, with a smile, he realized the true nature of his mistake. It's so strange to hear another man called by the name that was once your own. But the voice was Canon Valentine's, fresh back from Italy, and the 'Axminster' he was addressing was not Arnold Willoughby, but the new-made peer, his cousin Algy. Nevertheless, the incident made Arnold feel at once it was time to go. He was more afraid of Canon Valentine's recognising him than of any other acquaintance; for the Canon had known him so intimately as a boy, and used to speak to him so often about that instinctive trick of his—why, there! as Arnold thought of it, he removed his hand quickly from the lock in which it was twined, and dodged behind a little group of gossiping peers in the neighbourhood just in time to escape the Canon's scrutiny. But the Canon didn't see him; he was too busily engaged in shaking Algy's hand—too full of his

salutations to the rising sun to remember the setting one.

Arnold strolled out somewhat saddened. If ever in his life he felt inclined to be cynical, it must at least be admitted he had much just then to make him so. It was all a sad picture of human fickleness. And then, the bitter thought that Kathleen had been doing just like all of these was enough to sour any man. Arnold turned to leave the House by the strangers' entrance. In order to do so, he had to pass the door of the peers' robing-room. As he went by it, a fat little old gentleman emerged from the portal. It was Lord Helvellyn, who had passed him to the Strangers' Gallery. But now the little man looked at him with a queer gleam of recollection. Then a puzzled expression came over his sallow face.

'Look here,' he said, turning suddenly to Arnold; 'I want one word with you. What was that you told me about having sailed with Lord Axminster in the *Saucy Sally?*'

Arnold scented the danger at once, but answered in haste:

'It was true—quite true. I went out on her last voyage.'

'Nonsense, man,' the little fat law lord replied, scanning his witness hard, as is the wont of barristers, 'How dare you have the impudence to tell me so to my face, after hearing the evidence we summarized in our report? It's pure imposture. Douglas Overton or Lord Axminster made only one voyage on the *Saucy Sally;* and in the course of that voyage she was lost with all hands. It was that that we went upon. If anybody had survived, we must have heard of him, of course, and have given judgment differently. How do

you get out of that, eh? You're an impostor, sir—an impostor!'

'But I left the ship,' Arnold began hurriedly; he was going to say 'at Cape Town,' when it was borne in upon him all at once that if he confessed that fact, he would be practically reopening the whole field of inquiry; and with a crimson face he held his peace, most unwillingly. That was hard indeed, for nothing roused Arnold Willoughby's indignation more than an imputation of untruthfulness.

Lord Helvellyn smiled grimly.

'Go away, sir,' he cried with a gesture of honest contempt. 'You lied to me, and you know it. You're an impudent scoundrel, that's what you are—a most impudent scoundrel; and if ever I see you loitering about this house again, I'll give orders to the door-keeper to take you by the scruff of your neck and eject you forcibly.'

Arnold's blood boiled hot. For a second he felt himself once more an aristocrat. Was he to be jostled and hustled like this, with insult and contumely, from his own hereditary chamber, by a new-fangled law lord? Next moment his wrath cooled, and he saw for himself the utter illogicality, the two-sided absurdity, of his own position. It was clearly untenable. The old law lord was right. He was *not* the Earl of Axminster. These precincts of Parliament were no place for him in future. He slunk down the steps like a whipped cur. 'Twas for the very last time. As he went, he shook off the dust from his feet metaphorically. Whatever came now, he must never more be a Redburn or an Axminster. He was quit of it once for all. He emerged into Parliament Street, more fixedly than ever, a plain Arnold Willoughby.

If Kathleen Hesslegrave wished to make herself a Countess, she must fix her hopes somewhere else, he felt sure, than on Membury Castle. For him, the sea, and no more of this fooling! Life is real, life is earnest, and Arnold Willoughby meant to take it earnestly.

CHAPTER XV.

IN A CATHEDRAL CITY.

Weeks passed before Kathleen Hesslegrave recovered from the shock of that terrible disappointment. It shattered her nerves for the moment; it left her heart-broken. It was not so much the blow to her love, though that was bad enough—Kathleen was strong of soul, and could bear up against a mere love-trouble; it was the sense of being so completely and unjustly misunderstood; it was the feeling that the man she had loved best in the world had gone away from her entirely misconceiving and misreading her character. At the risk of seeming unwomanly, Kathleen would have followed him to the world's end, if she could, not so much for love's sake as to clear up that unendurable slight to her integrity. That any man, and above all Arnold Willoughby, should think her capable of planning a vile and deliberate plot to make herself a Countess, while pretending to be animated by the most disinterested motives, was a misfortune under which such a girl as Kathleen could not sit down quietly. It goaded her to action.

But as time went on, it became every day clearer and clearer to her that Arnold Willoughby had once

more disappeared into space, just as Lord Axminster had disappeared after the Blanche Middleton incident. It was utterly impossible for her even to begin trying to find him. Week after week she waited in misery and despair, growing every day more restless under such enforced inactivity, and eating her heart out with the sense of injustice. Not that she blamed Arnold Willoughby; she understood him too well, and sympathized with him too deeply, not to forgive him all; for *tout savoir, c'est tout pardonner*. He could hardly have drawn any other inference from Mrs. Hesslegrave's plain words than the inference he actually drew; and Kathleen admitted to herself that if she had really been what Arnold supposed her, she would have more than deserved the treatment he had accorded her. It was just that, indeed, that made the sting of the situation. She would have despised herself for being what she knew Arnold Willoughby couldn't possibly help thinking her.

Before long, however, many other things supervened to take Kathleen's mind for the present off Arnold Willoughby. Spring had set in over sea in England 'with its usual severity'; and Mrs. Hesslegrave felt it was time to return from the balmy May of Italy to the chilly and gusty month which usurps the same name in our Northern climates. So they struck their tents northward. As soon as they returned, there were the exhibitions to see about, and the sale of Kathleen's pictures and sketches to arrange for, and the annual trouble of Mr. Reginald's finances, with their normal deficit. Mr. Reginald, indeed, had been 'going it' that year with more than his accustomed vigour. He had been seeing a good deal through the winter of his friend Miss Florrie; and

though Miss Florrie, for her part, had not the slightest intention of 'chucking up her chances' by marrying Mr. Reginald, she 'rather liked the boy' in a mild uncommercial fashion, and permitted him to present her with sundry small testimonials of his ardent affection in the shape of gloves and bouquets, the final honour of payment for which fell, necessarily of course, on poor Kathleen's shoulders. For Miss Florrie was a young lady not wholly devoid of sentiment; she felt that to carry on a mild flirtation with Mr. Reginald, whom she never meant to marry, as an affair of the heart, was a sort of sacrificial homage to the higher emotions—an apologetic recognition of those tender feelings which she considered it her duty for the most part sternly to stifle. The consequence was that while she never for a moment allowed Mr. Reginald to suppose her liking for him was anything more than purely Platonic, she by no means discouraged his budding affection's floral offerings, or refused to receive those dainty-hued six-and-a-halfs in best Parisian kid which Reggie laid upon the shrine as an appropriate holocaust.

So, when poor Kathleen returned to London, distracted, and burning to discover Arnold Willoughby's whereabouts, the very first thing to which she was compelled to turn her attention was the perennial and ever-deepening entanglement of Master Reggie's budget. As usual in such cases, however, Reggie was wholly unable to account arithmetically for the disappearance of such large sums of money; he could but vaguely surmise with a fatuous smile that 'a jolly good lump of it' had gone in cab fares.

Kathleen glanced up at him reproachfully:

'But I *never* take a cab myself, Reggie,' she ex-

claimed with a sigh, 'except in the evening, or to pay a call at some house entirely off the 'bus routes. For ordinary day journeys, you know very well, I always take an omnibus.'

Reggie's lip curled profound contempt.

'My dear girl,' he replied with fraternal superiority, 'I hope I shall never sink quite as low as an omnibus.' (He was blandly unaware that he had sunk already a great many stages lower.) 'No self-respecting person ever looks at an omnibus nowadays. It may have been usual in *your* time'—Kathleen was five or six years older than her brother, which at his age seems an eternity—'but nowadays I assure you nobody does it. A hansom's the only thing, though I confess I don't think any gentleman ought to rest content till he can make it a victoria. My ideal is in time to set up a victoria; but how can a fellow do that on my paltry salary?'

Poor Kathleen sighed. How, indeed! That was the worst of Reggie; he was so unpractical and incorrigible. At the very moment when she was trying to impress upon him the enormity of owing money he couldn't possibly pay, and coming down upon her scanty earnings to make good the deficiency, he would burst in upon her with this sort of talk about the impossibility of stewing in the pit of a theatre, and the absolute necessity for every gentleman to have a stall of his own, and a flower in his button-hole, even though it devolved upon other people to pay for them. To say the truth, they had no common point of contact. Kathleen's principle was that you had no right to contract debts if you had no means of paying them; Reggie's principle was that you must live at all hazards 'like a gentleman'—even though you allowed a

woman to pay with her own work for the cost of the proceedings.

As soon as Reggie's affairs had been set comparatively straight, and as many of his more pressing debts as he could be induced for the moment to acknowledge had been duly discharged by Kathleen's aid, the poor girl set to work in real earnest to discover, if possible, what had become of Arnold Willoughby. She didn't want to see him—not just at present, at least, till this misunderstanding was cleared up, if cleared up it could ever be by her bare assertion. But she did want to know where he was, to write and explain to him, to tell him how deeply and how completely he had misjudged her. It was all in vain, however. She had to eat her heart out with unfulfilled desire. Go where she would, she could hear nothing at all of him. She dived into the recesses of East-End coffee-houses, sadly against her will—places where it seemed incredible to her that Arnold Willoughby should be found, and where, nevertheless, many sailors seemed to know him. 'Willoughby? Ay, Willoughby. That's the chap that used to make me hand him over my screw, as soon as it was paid, and send three parts of it home to my missis, and keep the rest for me, for baccy and such-like. Ay, he was a good sort, he was; but it's long sin' I saw him. Drownded, mayhap, or left the sea or summat.' That was all she could hear of Arnold in the seafaring quarter. It seemed quite natural to those hardy salts that a person of their acquaintance should disappear suddenly for a year or two from their ken, or even should drop out of existence altogether, without anyone's missing him. 'It's like huntin' for a needle in a bottle of hay, miss,' one old sailor observed with a

friendly smile, 'to look for a seaman in the Port o' London. Mayhap, when the sealers come back to Dundee, you might get some news o' him; for Willoughby he were always one as had an eye on the sealin'.' With that slender hope Kathleen buoyed herself up for the present; but her poor heart sank as she thought that during all these weeks Arnold must be going on thinking worse and ever worse of her, letting the wound rankle deep in that sensitive breast of his.

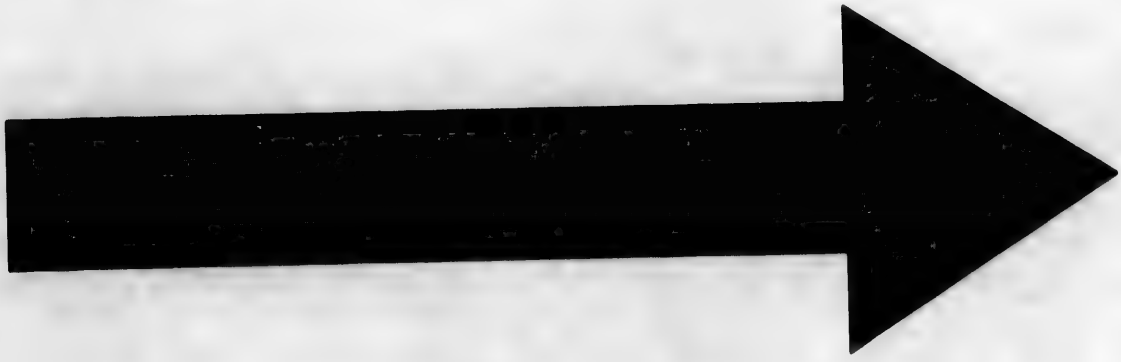
One element of brightness alone there was in her life for the moment; her art at least was being better and better appreciated. She sold her Academy picture for more than double what she had ever before received; and no wonder, for she painted it in the thrilling ecstasy of first maiden passion. If it hadn't been for this rise in her prices, indeed, she didn't know how she could have met Mr. Reginald's demands; and Mr. Reginald himself, quick to observe where a fresh chance opened, immediately discounted Kathleen's betterment in market value by incurring several new debts with tailor and tobacconist on the strength of his sister's increased ability to pay them in future.

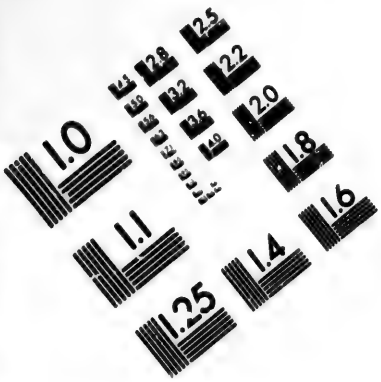
As soon as the London season was over, however, the Hesslegraves received an invitation to go down to Norchester on a visit to the Valentines. Mrs. Hesslegrave was highly pleased with this invitation. 'Such a good place to be seen, you know, dear, the Valentines; and a Cathedral town, too! The Bishop and Canons are so likely to buy; and even if they don't, one feels one's associating with ladies and gentlemen.' Poor Kathleen shrank from it, indeed; for was it not Canon Valentine who indirectly and unintentionally

had brought about all her troubles by incautiously letting out the secret of Arnold Willoughby's personality? But she went, for all that; for it was her way to sacrifice herself. Many good women have learnt that lesson only too well, I fear, and would be all the better for an inkling of the opposite one, that self-development is a duty almost as real and as imperative as self-sacrifice.

So down to Norchester she went. She had no need now to caution Mrs. Hesslegrave against opening her mouth again about the Axminster episode; for the good lady, having once hopelessly compromised herself on that mysterious subject, was so terrified at the result that she dared not even broach it afresh to Kathleen. Since the day of Arnold Willoughby's disappearance, indeed, mother and daughter had held their peace to one another on the matter; and that very silence overawed Mrs. Hesslegrave, who knew from it how deeply Kathleen's heart had been wounded. As for the Canon, now Algy had obtained the peerage, it was more than ever his cue to avoid any allusion to the sailor he had so rashly recognised at Venice. He was convinced in his own mind by this time that Bertie Redburn must have committed some crime, the consequences of which he was endeavouring to shirk by shuffling off his personality; and if that attempt redounded to Algy's advantage, it was certainly very far from the Canon's wish to interfere in any way with the fugitive's anonymity. So he, too, held his peace without a hint or a word. He was willing to let the hasty exclamation wrung from him on the spur of the moment at Venice be forgotten, if possible, by all who heard it.

On their first day at Norchester, Kathleen went





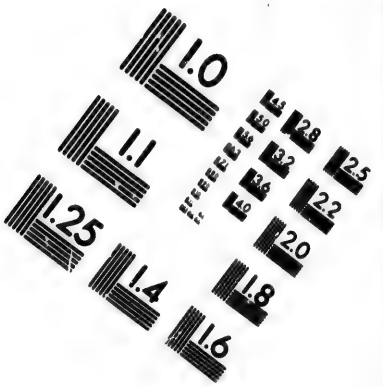
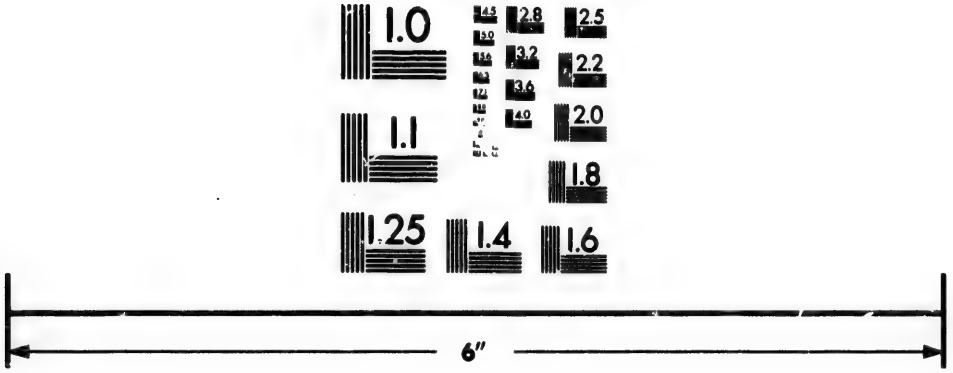


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down with their host to the Cathedral. There's something very charming and sweet and grave about our English cathedrals, even after the gorgeous churches of Italy; and Kathleen admired immensely the beautiful green close, the old-world calm, the meditative view from the Canon's windows upon the palace gardens. It was all so still, so demure, so peaceful, so English. As they walked round the building towards the great east window, the Canon was apologetic about his hasty flight from Venice.

'I went away suddenly, I know,' he said; 'but, then, you must admit, Miss Hesslegrave, it's a most insanitary town. Such smells! Such filth! It just reeks with typhoid.'

'Well, I allow the perfumes,' Kathleen answered, bridling up in defence of her beloved Venice; 'but as to the typhoid, I have my doubts. The sea seems to purify it. Do you know, Canon Valentine, I've spent five winters on end in Venice, and I've never had a personal friend ill with fever; while in England I've had dozens. It isn't always the places that look the dirtiest which turn out in the long-run to be really most insanitary. And if it comes to that, what could possibly be worse than those slums we passed on our way out of the close, near the pointed archway, where you cross the river?'

The Canon bristled up in turn. This was really most annoying. As a matter of fact, those particular slums were the property of the Dean and Chapter of Norchester, and complaints had been going about in the local paper that they were no wholesomer than they ought to be; which made it, of course, all the more intolerable that they should attract the attention of a complete stranger.

'Not at all,' he answered testily. 'Those are very good cottages—very good cottages indeed. I can see nothing wrong with them. You can't expect to house working-people in the Bishop's Palace, and to give them port-wine and venison every day *ad libitum*. But as working-men's houses, they're very good houses; and I wouldn't mind living in one of them myself—if I were a working-man,' the Canon added in an after-thought, 'and had been brought up to the ways of them.'

Kathleen said no more, for she saw the Canon was annoyed; and she knew when to be silent. But that morning at lunch the Canon enlarged greatly upon the health and cleanliness of Norchester in general, and the Cathedral close and property in particular. It was wholesomeness itself; the last word of sanitation. Nobody ever got ill there; nobody ever died; and he had never even heard of a case of typhoid.

'Except old Grimes, dear,' Mrs. Valentine interposed incautiously.

The Canon crushed her with a glance.

'Old Grimes,' he said angrily, 'brought the seeds of it with him from a visit to Bath—which I don't consider at all so well sanitated as Norchester; and I told the Dean so at our diocesan synod. But not another case—not a case can I remember.—No, Amelia, it's no use; I know what you're going to say. Mrs. Wheeler's fever came straight from London, which, we all of us know, is a perfect pest-hole; and as to poor old Canon Brooks, he contracted it in Italy. The precentor! No, no! Goodness gracious! has it come to this, then?—that not only do vile agitators print these things openly in penny papers for our servants to read, but even our own wives must go

throwing dirt in the faces of the Cathedral Chapter! I tell you, Amelia, the town's as clean as a new pin; and the property of the close is a model of sanitation.'

That evening, however, by some strange mischance, the Canon himself complained of headache. Next morning he was worse, and they sent for the doctor. The doctor looked grave.

'I've been expecting this sooner or later,' he said, 'if something wasn't done about those slums by the river. I'm afraid, Mrs. Valentine, it would be only false kindness to conceal the truth from you. The Canon shows undoubted symptoms of typhoid.'

It was quite true. He had caught it three weeks earlier on a visit of inspection to Close Wynd, the slum by the river, where he had duly pronounced the cottages on the Cathedral property 'perfectly fit for human habitation.' And now, out of his own mouth, had nature convicted him. For, in his eagerness to prove that all was for the best, in the best of all possible Cathedral towns, for the tenants of the Chapter, he had asked for and tossed off a glass of the tainted water to which the borough sanitary inspector was calling his attention.

'Perfectly pure and good,' he said, in his testy way. 'Never tasted better water in my life, I assure you. What the people want to complain about nowadays fairly passes my comprehension.'

And he went his way rejoicing. But for twenty-one days those insidious little microbes that he swallowed so carelessly lay maturing their colony in the Canon's doomed body. At the end of that time they swarmed and developed themselves; and even the Canon himself knew in his own heart, unspoken, that it was the

Close Wynd water that had given him typhoid fever. When he made his will, he did not forget it; and the lawyer who opened it eight days later found that in that hasty sheet, dictated from his death-bed, the Canon had remembered to leave two hundred pounds for the improvement of the sanitary condition of the 'perfect' cottages which had proved his destruction.

One day later Mrs. Valentine succumbed. She, too, had drunk the poisonous water, 'for example's sake, Amelia,' her husband had said to her; and she, too, died after a short attack. It was a most virulent type of the disease, the doctor said—the type that comes of long sanitary neglect and wholesale pollution. But that was not all. These things seldom stop short with the original culprits. Mrs. Hesslegrave was seized, too, after nursing her two old friends through their fatal illness; and, being weak and ill beforehand with regret and remorse for the part she had played in driving away the Earl whom Kathleen wanted to marry (for that was the way in which Mrs. Hesslegrave thought of it to the very end), she sank rapidly under the strain, and died within a fortnight of the two Valentines. So Kathleen found herself practically alone in the world, and with Reginald on her hands, except so far as his 'paltry salary' would enable a gentleman of so much social pretension to keep himself in the barest necessaries at the florist's and the glover's.

In the midst of her real grief for a mother she had oved and watched over tenderly, it did not strike Kathleen at the time that by these three deaths, following one another in such rapid succession, the only three other depositaries of Arnold Willoughby's

secret had been removed at one blow, and that she herself remained now the sole person on earth who could solve the Axminster mystery. But it occurred to her later on, when the right time came, and when she saw what must be done about Arnold Willoughby's future.

CHAPTER XVI.

WITHOUT SECURITY.

As soon as the funeral was over, Kathleen returned to town to prove her mother's will. Mrs. Hesslegrave had little to leave, and her pension died with her. Her own small property, a trifle scarcely worth considering, she divided in equal shares between Kathleen and Reginald. But Mr. Reginald was not a little surprised at this equitable arrangement.

'Of course, I don't grumble,' he said magnanimously to his sister, as she turned her pale face up to him from her newly-made mourning; 'but it's beastly unfair, that's what I call it: and I confess it isn't quite what I'd have expected from the mater.'

Kathleen stared at him with tears in her eyes. It shocked her inexpressibly to hear him speak of their mother at such a moment with so little feeling.

'Unfair!' she exclaimed, taken aback; 'why, how do you make that out, Reggie? We're both to share alike. I don't quite see myself how anything could well be made very much fairer!'

But Reggie plumed himself on the sense of what Aristotle describes as 'distributive justice.'

'I don't at all agree with you,' he answered with

vigour, digging his hands into his trousers-pockets doggedly. 'I'm a man; you're a woman. That makes all the difference. A man's needs in life are far greater than a woman's. He has society to think of. A woman can live upon anything, her wants are so few: a man requires much more—cigars, cabs, theatres, an occasional outing; a Sunday up the river; a box at the opera.'

In which chivalrous theory of the relations of the sexes, Mr. Reginald Hesslegrave is kept in countenance by not a few of his kind in London and elsewhere.

'I don't see why a man should have all those things any more than a woman—if he can't afford them,' Kathleen answered with more spirit than she was aware she possessed. 'Because so many women are content to scrape and slave for the sake of the men of their families, I don't see that that entitles the men to suppose every woman is bound to do it for them. Why should you be any better entitled to a box at the opera, if it comes to that, than I am?'

'Oh, well, if you've no sense of family dignity,' Reggie interjected obliquely, taking the enemy by a flank movement at the weakest point, 'and would like to see your brother sit stewing in the pit among a promiscuous pack of howling cads, or wearing a coat that would disgrace an office-boy, why, of course there's no answering you. It's wasting words to argue. I was taking it for granted you had still *some* sense left of sisterly affection, and some decent pride in your relations' position. But I suppose you'd like to see me sweeping a crossing. Besides,' he went on after a brief pause, 'you've your painting to fall back upon. You can earn money at that. It's a jolly

good profession. The mater ought to have considered the differences in our positions, and have "governed herself accordingly," as we say in the City.'

'But *you* have your salary!' Kathleen exclaimed, distressed to hear him question so lightly their mother's sense of justice; for, like most good women, she was more loyal to her mother than her mother (to say the truth) had ever deserved of her. 'That's something fixed and certain; you can always count upon it; while my work's precarious: I may happen to sell, or I may happen to make a failure. And then, too, you're a man, and what's the use of being a man, I should like to know—a superior being—a lord of creation—if you can't be trusted to earn your own livelihood better than a woman could? If there's to be a difference at all, surely it's the women, the weaker of the two, and the less able on the average to take care of themselves, who ought to receive the most! A man can work for his living; a woman can't so well; more doors are closed to her; and I think all that ought to be taken into consideration in arranging inheritances as between sons and daughters.'

'*My* salary!' Mr. Reginald repeated, with supreme scorn in his voice. '*My* paltry salary! That beggarly sum! How can you expect a man brought up with the tastes and feelings of a gentleman to live upon a miserable pittance like that? You don't understand these things, that's where it is; you're not in society. You go and paint half your time at some place or other in Italy'—Mr. Reginald had a profound and impartial contempt for all foreign countries—'and you don't understand the needs and requirements of a man about town. They don't come home to you. Why, neckties alone—there's an item

for you! I'm distracted with the difficulty of providing good neckties. And flowers, again! How can one do without flowers? I don't suppose I should ever have a chance of rising to be an Authorized, if Jones were to see me without a gardenia in my buttonhole!'

'Rising to be a what?' Kathleen inquired, looking puzzled.

'An Authorized,' Reggie replied with a superior smile. 'Oh no; I didn't expect you to understand what I meant. It's a beastly vulgar slang, the slang of the Stock Exchange: but what can you expect? If a man's put by his people into a hole of a stockbroker's office, instead of into a cavalry regiment, where his appearance and manners entitle him to be —why, of course, he must pick up the vile lingo of the disgusting hole he's been stuck in. An Authorized is a clerk, a superior clerk, a sort of Trusted Servant, who pays a special subscription to the House, and is entitled to act on his employer's account exactly like a broker. He gets a jolly good screw, an Authorized does in a good firm. I hope in time, by my merits, to rise to be an Authorized. I'll make things hop then, I can tell you, Kitty: Threadneedle Street won't know me!'

'And who's Jones?' Kathleen inquired once more, never having heard till that moment of this mysterious personage.

'Why, our senior partner, of course,' Reggie answered with gusto.

'But I thought he was a Greek, with a very long name,' Kathleen answered, much puzzled.

'So he is,' Reggie replied. 'His full name's Ioannipulides. Now, no Christian body can be

expected to say "Mr. Ioannipulides" fifty times over in the course of a working day—which is only eight hours—so we call him Jones for short. It's every bit as effective, and a deal less expensive on the vocal organs.'

'I see,' Kathleen replied, and was silent for a moment.

'However,' Mr. Reggie continued, returning to the charge, unshattered, 'it doesn't matter how the poor mater *left* the money, don't you know, one way or the other: that's neither here nor there. The long and the short of it is, whether you like it or whether you lump it, you'll have to fork over your share to me as soon as we've got clear through with this beastly probate business; for I want the tin, and, to put it fair and square, I can't do without it.'

Kathleen stood aghast at the proposal.

'What? all dear mother left me!' she cried, thunderstruck. 'You expect me to give it up to you?'

Mr. Reginald assumed a severely logical expression of face.

'I don't *expect* anything,' he replied with conscious moderation. 'In this world, I know, one's exposed to perpetual disappointment. People are so selfish, that's the fact: they never think at all of other people's situations. They won't put themselves in their shoes. All I say is this: I *expect* nothing; but if you want to see your brother hauled up in the Bankruptcy Court—liabilities, seven hundred and fifty odd: assets, four-and-tuppence—"the bankrupt was severely reprimanded by the learned Commissioner, and did not receive his discharge"—why, of course, you're quite at liberty to look on and enjoy that charming spectacle. It don't matter to *me*. I'd soon

get used to it. Though I *would* have thought mere family affection, to say nothing of family pride—for I perceive you haven't got any——'

'But, Reggie,' Kathleen cried, horror-struck, 'you don't mean to tell me that, with your income, you're more than seven hundred pounds in debt? It isn't really true, is it?'

Reggie gazed at her contemptuously.

'What a storm in a teapot!' he answered with gentlemanly scorn. 'Maybe six hundred and fifty. Maybe eight hundred. A gentleman doesn't generally trouble himself about the details of these matters. He buys what he can't possibly do without; and he pays for it by instalments from time to time as occasion offers. His tailor says to him: "Would it be perfectly convenient to you, sir, to let me have a few pounds on account within the next six weeks or so?—for, if so, I should be glad of it. I'm sorry to trouble you, sir; but, you see, your little bill has been running on so long!"—and he rubs his hands apologetically. And then you say to him in a careless way: "Well, no, Saunders, it wouldn't. I don't happen to have any spare cash in hand to waste on paying bills just at the present moment—Ascot coming on, don't you know, and all that sort of thing; but I'll tell you what I'll do for you; you can make me a couple more suits, tweed dittoes, and knickerbockers." That's the way to manage tradesmen; they don't mind about money, as long as they get your custom: though, as a consequence, of course, one doesn't always remember exactly what one owes within a hundred and fifty pounds or so.'

'Reggie,' Kathleen said firmly, 'I call it wicked of you—wicked!'

'So one's people generally remark,' Reggie answered with perfect unconcern. 'I was talking over this subject with Charlie Owen yesterday, and he told me his governor made precisely the same remark to him last time he struck for an increased allowance. It's astonishing how little originality there is in human beings!'

It was useless being angry with him; so Kathleen began again.

'Now, Reggie,' she said in a serious voice, 'I'm not going to make you a present this time of anything. You must find out what you owe, and show me the bills; and then perhaps I may be disposed to lend you what you need—on note of hand, you understand—till you're rich enough to pay me.'

'Oh dear yes, I understand,' Reggie answered with alacrity. 'I understand down to the ground. Notes of hand are my *spécialité*. Almost all this that I want to clear off just now is on note of hand, Kitty. Fact is, I'm in a hole; and it's no good denying it. Of course, if you choose to leave your brother in a hole, like Jacob's sons, for the Midianites or somebody to pull him out and sell him up, you're perfectly at liberty, I admit, to do it. But a hole I'm in; and it's notes of hand have put me there. You see, I expected to come into whatever private property the poor mater had; and I expected it to turn out a good deal more than it actually has done. I'm a victim of misapprehension. I flew a kite or two, making 'em payable within six months—of—well, you know, what they call a post-obit. And now I find I can't meet 'em, which is awkward—very; and unless the members of my family come forward and help me, I suppose I must go into the court—and lose my situation.'

That was a good trump-card, and Mr. Reginald knew it.

'But you solemnly declared to me, only six months since, you hadn't a debt in the world except the ones I paid for you!' Kathleen exclaimed reproachfully. 'Why didn't you tell me then the exact amount of your indebtedness?'

'No fellow ever *does* tell his people the exact amount of his indebtedness,' Reggie answered with airy candour. 'It's a trait of human nature.' Which was no doubt quite true, but not particularly consolatory to Kathleen in the present emergency.

'It's very, very wrong of you, Reggie,' she said again, trying to be properly stern with him.

'Oh, that's all rot!' Reggie answered with his usual frankness. 'It's no good pitching into any chap because he behaves exactly the same as every other chap does. I told you there's precious little originality in human nature. I've gone on as all other young men go on in a decent position; and you've gone on in the ordinary way common to their people; so now suppose we drop it all, and get forward with the business.'

And get forward with the business they did accordingly. After a great many subterfuges and petty attempts at deception, Reggie was at last induced to furnish Kathleen, to the best of his ability, with a tolerably complete list of his various creditors and the amounts he owed them. Every item, he explained in detail, was 'simply unavoidable.' These gloves, for example, were necessaries—most undoubted necessaries; any judge would pass them, for a fellow in his position. Those flowers were naturally part of his costume; hang it all! a man must dress. If people

appeared in public insufficiently clad, why, as a matter of common morals, the police interfered with them. As for that fan, put down at fifty shillings, Florrie Clarke had bought that one evening when she was out with him; and he said to the shopman, 'Put it down to me!'—as also with the bouquets, the brooch, and the earrings.

'But what could I do?' he pleaded plaintively. 'She said she wanted them. I was a man, don't you see. I couldn't stand by and let a woman pay for them.'

'It strikes me you're going to let a woman pay for them now,' Kathleen put in with just severity.

Reggie smiled his graceful smile, and, as he did so, Kathleen couldn't help admitting that, after all, he was a very good-looking boy, Reggie.

'Ah, but that's quite a different matter,' he answered, laying one brotherly hand on her shoulder, with a caressing glance. 'You see, *you're* my sister!'

And what a creature a woman is! How inconsistent! How placable! That one fraternal act made Kathleen overlook all Reggie's misdeeds at once and for ever. I regret to have to chronicle it: but she stooped down and kissed him. The kiss settled the question.

Reggie swept the field in triumph. Before he left Kathleen's rooms that afternoon he had extracted a promise that on his producing his bills, and stating the precise amounts of his funded debts in the way of notes of hand with his various creditors, he should receive a sufficient sum in ready cash to settle in full and begin life over again. He meant to turn over a new leaf, he said, cheering up at the prospect. And so he did—in the ledger. A clean sweep of all his

bills would allow him to start afresh with increased credit—since his creditors would now conclude he had come into money. Indeed, he instantly formed, in his own imaginative mind, a splendid scheme for inviting Florrie and her mamma down to Richmond on a drag, with Charlie Owen to assist, and a few other good fellows to help drink the dry Monopole. What's the good of getting your people to pay off all you owe, if nobody but the beastly tradesmen is to derive any benefit from their generous behaviour?

So convinced was Mr. Reginald of this truth, indeed, and so firmly determined not to let Kathleen's kindness be wasted for nothing, that on his way down town again from his sister's rooms he turned casually into his tobacconist's in passing.

'I say, Morton,' he observed in an easy tone, 'will you just let me have your little bill to-night? I'm thinking of paying it.'

'Oh, certainly, sir,' the subservient tobacconist answered, with an oily smile, wondering mutely to himself whether this was a dodge to obtain fresh credit.

Reggie read the thought in his eye, and gave a nod of dissent, to correct the misapprehension before it went any further.

'No, it ain't that *this* time, Morton,' he said briskly, with charming sociality. 'No larks, I promise you! I'm on the pay just now; come into a little oof, and arranged with my people.' (That impersonal form sounds so much more manly, and so much more chivalrous, than if one were to say outright, 'my sister!') 'But I want some weeds, too, now I come to think of it, so you may send me round a couple of

boxes of those old Porto Ricos. But, if you like, you needn't deliver them till after the bill's paid. Only,' he added, looking his purveyor very straight in the face with a furtive yet searching glance, 'I'd like you to put them down on the bill, don't you know; and, if it's all the same to you, I'd like you to antedate them—say last February—or else I expect my people won't pay, and will cut up rusty.'

The tobacconist smiled a meaning smile. He was well acquainted long since with such threadbare little ruses, which, after the fashion of gentlemen doing a risky trade with young men about town, he condoned as in the end very good for business.

'All right, sir,' he answered, with a nod; 'I quite understand. They shall be entered as you wish. We deal as between men. And just to show you, sir, that I trust you down to the ground, and have perfect confidence in your honour as a gentleman—there need be no trouble about waiting for payment; I'll send the cigars up to your rooms this evening. Will you take a weed now, sir? I can offer you a really very nice Havana.'

Reggie was so delighted with the encouraging result of this first attempt, that he ventured to go a single step further in the same direction. It's convenient, don't you know, for a gentleman to have a little spare cash in hand for emergencies like the projected visit to Richmond.

'And look here, Morton,' he went on evasively, '*would* you mind just doing me a *very* small favour? I'm in want of ready cash; no rhino in hand: but my people, I'm proud to say, are behaving like bricks. They're paying up everything. They'll settle anything in reason I bring in just now as part of my embarrass-

ments. They're prepared for a lump of it. *Could* you make it convenient just to lend me a mere trifle of twenty-five quid for the immediate present? A nominal loan, don't you know, not to take effect till I've paid my debts—but antedate the I O U, say, from last December or January? It'd give me a little ready money for current expenses, don't you see, which is really an element "making for virtue," as Charlie Owen says, because it prevents one from getting into new debt the very day one's out of the old one!'

Morton hummed and hawed; to antedate the I O U was a felonious act, he rather fancied; but in the end he gave way, and the net result of Mr. Reginald's day was finally this: that he had induced poor Kathleen, out of the slender patrimony which was all she had for certain to count upon in the world, to pay off his debts for him; and that he now found himself with twenty-five pounds of her money in pocket, with which to begin a fresh campaign of silly extravagance. But if you think these proceedings gave Mr. Reginald Hesslegrave a single qualm of conscience, you very much misunderstand that young gentleman's character.

On the contrary, meeting Charlie Owen on the way down the Strand, he begged that like-minded soul to partake of dinner with him forthwith at a first-class restaurant, triumphantly confided to him in the course of the meal, without extenuating aught or setting down aught in malice, the whole of these two dialogues, and finally extended to him a cordial invitation to share a boat up the river with him and the Clarkes, some day very soon, out of the remainder of poor Kitty's plundered money.

CHAPTER XVII.

THE HEART OF THE DECOY DUCK.

It was about those same days that the brand-new Lord Axminster, strolling down the Row one afternoon arm in arm with his impecunious friend Captain Bourchier, nodded a little familiarly to a very pretty girl on a neat chestnut mare, accompanied by a groom of the starchiest respectability. Lord Axminster's salute was too easy-going, indeed, to be described as a bow; it resembled rather the half-playful bob with which one touches one's hat to some man acquaintance. But the pretty girl considered a recognition, no matter how scanty, from a man in Lord Axminster's position, too important a matter to be casually thrown away; and reining in her mount, she drew near to the rails, and exclaimed in a saucy yet sleepy voice:

'Well, how goes it this morning?'

'Oh, all right,' Lord Axminster answered in a nonchalant tone. 'Are you going to the Graham Pringles' hop this evening?'

'I don't think so,' the pretty girl responded with a careless smile. 'Too hot, you know, for dancing.' Which was a graceful way of covering the unacknowledged truth that she had not in point of fact received an invitation.

Lord Axminster asked a few more of the usual useless society questions, and then stifled a yawn. The pretty girl stroked her mare's glossy neck, and with an easy nod went on her way again, rejoicing in the consciousness that she had attracted the attention of the loungers by the rails as the acquaintance of a

genuine nobleman. As soon as she had gone, Captain Bourchier turned to his friend.

'I say, Axminster,' he observed with a tinge of querulousness in his voice, 'you *might* have introduced me. I call it beastly mean of a man to keep all his good things to himself like that. Who is the young woman? She's confoundedly good-looking.'

'Yes, she *is* a nice little thing,' Axminster admitted, half grudgingly. 'Nothing in her, of course, and a kind of sleepy Venus; but distinctly nice-looking, if you care for them that way. A trifle vulgar, though; and more than a trifle silly. But she's good enough for a trip up the river, don't you know. The sort of girl one can endure from eighteen to eight-and-twenty.'

'Who is she?' Captain Bourchier asked, looking after her with obvious interest.

'Who is she? Ah, there you come to the point. Well, that's just it; who is she? Why, Spider Clarke's daughter. You've heard of her—the Decoy-Duck.'

Captain Bourchier pursed his lips. The news evidently interested him.

'So that's the Decoy Duck!' he repeated slowly with a broadening smile. 'So that's Spider Clarke's Decoy Duck! Well, I don't wonder she serves her purpose. She's as personable a girl as I've seen for a twelvemonth.'

'She *is* pretty,' Lord Axminster admitted in the same grudging fashion.

'Any brothers?' Captain Bourchier asked, as though the question were one of not the slightest importance.

Lord Axminster smiled.

'Ah, there you go straight to the point,' he answered, 'like a good man of business! That's just it;

no brothers. She's the only child of her father, and he's a money-lender. I admire you, Bourchier, for the frank and straightforward way you put your finger on the core of whatever subject you deal with. No beating about the bush or unnecessary sentimentality about *you*, dear boy! She *has* no brothers; she represents the entire reversionary interest, at fourteen per cent., in old Spider Clarke's money.'

Captain Bourchier assumed at once an apologetic air.

'Well, you see,' he said candidly, 'if one's looking out for tin, it's such a great point to find the tin combined with a young woman who isn't wholly and entirely distasteful to one. I don't go in for sentiment, as you justly observe; but, hang it all! I don't want to go and fling myself away upon the very first young woman that ever turns up with a few thousands to her name, irrespective of the question whether she's one-eyed or humpbacked, a woolly-haired nigger or a candidate for a lunatic asylum. Now, this girl's good-looking; she's straight and well made; and I suppose she has the oof; so, if one's going to give up one's freedom for a woman at all, I should say the Decoy Duck was well worth inquiring about.'

'Very possibly,' Lord Axminster replied, as one who dismisses an uninteresting subject.

'Well, has she the dibs? That's the question,' Captain Bourchier continued, returning to the charge undismayed, as becomes a cavalry officer.

'Spider Clarke is rich, I suppose,' Lord Axminster answered with a little irritability. 'He ought to be, I know. He's had enough out of *me*, anyhow. I'm one of his flies. He did all those bills for me, before anybody believed my cousin Bertie was really dead;

and as it was very speculative business, of course he did them at a heavy discount. He feathered his nest from me. His kites must have swallowed up five years at least of the Membury rent-roll, I should think, before he was "through with it," as that American girl says. I know he's left me pretty well cleaned out. And Florrie will have it all, I suppose. The girl's name is Florrie.'

'Do you think Lady Axminster would ask me to meet her?' Captain Bourchier inquired tentatively.

The new peer raised his eyebrows.

'I'm sure I don't know,' he replied with a doubtful air, like one who could hardly answer for Lady Axminster's conduct. 'They are not exactly the sort of people my wife cares to ask—not even before we'd got things set straight with them financially. Her acquaintance with Miss Florrie and Miss Florrie's mamma was always of the most formal and perfunctory description. Besides, if you want to know the girl, there's no need to approach her as if she were a Duchess. It's easy enough for anybody with a stiver to his name to pick up Florrie Clarke's acquaintance.'

'Oh yes, of course; I can see that for myself,' Captain Bourchier went on with the same cynical candour. 'It's plain enough to anyone she's the sort of young lady who's directly approachable from all quarters. But that's not what I want, don't you see? I want to be introduced to her, fair and square, in the society way, and to judge for myself whether or not she'll do for me. If she does do, then I shall have put things from the first upon a proper basis, so that her father and mother will understand at once in what spirit I approach her. Hang it all, you know, Axminster, when a man thinks it's on the cards he

may possibly marry a girl, why, respect for the lady who may in the end become his wife makes him desire to conduct all his relations with her, from the beginning, decently and in order.'

Lord Axminster's lips curled.

'I appreciate the delicacy of your feelings, my dear boy,' he answered, with a faint touch of irony; 'and if Ethel doesn't mind, you shall meet the girl at dinner.'

It was a proud evening indeed for Mrs. Clarke and Florrie when first they dined at Lady Axminster's. To be sure, their hostess put up her tortoise-shell eyeglasses more than once during the course of the dinner, and surveyed the money-lender's wife through them with a good long stony British stare, for all the world as if she were a specimen of some rare new genus, just introduced from Central Africa into the Zoological Gardens of English society. But Mrs. Clarke, who was too stout to notice these little things, lived on through the stares in the complacent satisfaction of the diamonds that glittered on her own expansive neck; while as for Florrie, with her short black hair even more frizzed and fluffy than ever, she was too deeply taken up with that charming Captain Bourchier to notice what was happening between her mamma and their hostess. Captain Bourchier, she felt, was quite the right sort of man—a perfect gentleman. He was older than Reggie Hesslegrave, of course, but very nearly as good-looking: and then, he was well connected, and held such delightfully cynical views of life—in fact, disbelieved in everybody and everything, which, as all the world knows, is so extremely high-toned. Miss Florrie was delighted with him. He wasn't rich, to be sure; that papa and

mamma had heard; but he was the son of an Honourable, and the first-cousin of a peer, not to mention remote chances of succeeding through his mother to a baronetcy in abeyance. Florrie felt at once this was a very different case from poor dear Reggie Hesslegrave's; and when at the end of the evening Captain Bourchier gave her hand the most delicately chivalrous pressure imaginable, and trusted Mrs. Clarke would allow him to call some day soon at Rutland Gate, Florrie realized on the spot this was genuine business, and responded with a maiden blush of the purest water. That dainty little baby face was always equal to such an emergency; for Miss Florrie had the manners of the most shrinking *ingénue*, with the mind and soul which might reasonably be expected of Spider Clarke's daughter.

And yet not wholly so, as things turned out in the end: for, after Captain Bourchier had called once or twice at Rutland Gate, and had duly poured into Miss Florrie's ears his tale of artless love, and been officially accepted by Miss Florrie's papa and mamma as the prospective inheritor of Miss Florrie's thousands, a strange thing came to pass in the inmost recesses of Miss Florrie's heart—a thing that Miss Florrie herself could never possibly have counted upon. For when she came to tell Reggie Hesslegrave that she had received a most eligible offer from a captain in a cavalry regiment, and had accepted it with the advice and consent of her parents, poor Reggie's face grew so pale and downcast that Florrie fairly pitied him. And then, with a flash of surprise, the solemn discovery burst in upon her that in spite of papa and mamma, and the principles they had instilled, she and Reggie Hesslegrave were actually in love with one another.

It was true, quite true: so far as those two young people were capable of loving, they were actually in love with one another. The human heart, that very incalculable factor in the problem of life, had taken its revenge at last on Miss Florrie. She had been brought up to believe the heart was a thing to be lightly stifled in the interests of the highest bidder, social or mercantile; and now that she had accepted a most eligible bid, all things considered, she woke up all at once to sudden consciousness of the fact that her heart, her heart too, had a word to say in this matter. What she had mistaken for the merest passing flirtation with Reggie Hesslegrave was in reality a vast deal more deep and serious than what she had been taught to regard as the grave business of life with Captain Bourchier. She had feelings a little profounder and more genuine than she suspected. The soul within her was not quite so dead as her careful upbringing had led her to believe it.

In point of fact, when real tears rose spontaneous, at the announcement, in Reggie Hesslegrave's eyes, real tears rose to meet them in Miss Florrie's in turn. They were both astonished to find how much each thought of the other.

Not that Florrie had the faintest intention—just as yet—of throwing overboard her eligible cavalry officer. That would be the purest Quixotism. But she recognised at the same time that the cavalry officer was business, society, convention; while Reggie Hesslegrave was now romance—a perilous delight she had never till that moment dreamed of. As romance she accepted him, therefore, and much romance she got out of him; risky romance of a sort that stirred in poor Florrie's sleepy sluggish heart a strange throbbing

and beating never before suspected. She was engaged to Captain Bourchier, of course, and she meant to marry him; one doesn't throw overboard such a chance as that of placing one's self at once in the very thick of good society. But week after week, and month after month, while she met Captain Bourchier from time to time at dance or racecourse, she still went on writing in private most passionately despairing letters to Reggie Hesslegrave, whom she could never marry. As she put it herself, she was dead stuck on Reggie. Week after week, and month after month, she made stolen opportunities for meeting him, unawares, as it seemed, by Hyde Park Corner, or saying a few hurried words to him as she passed in Piccadilly. Then the interviews between them grew bolder and bolder; Florrie pencilled a few hasty lines:

'Will be at the Academy with mamma to-morrow at ten; meet me, if you can, in the Architectural Drawings; it's always empty. I'll leave mamma in one of the other rooms; she doesn't care to go round and look at all the pictures.'

And these fleeting moments grew dearer and ever dearer to Florrie Clarke's mind; they came as a revelation to her of a new force in her bosom; till she got engaged to Captain Bourchier, she had never herself suspected what profound capacity for a simple sort of every-day romance existed within her

Moreover, 'tis a peculiarity of the thing we call love that it gets out of every man and every woman the very best that is in them. Reggie Hesslegrave began to feel himself in his relation to Florrie quite other than he had ever felt himself in any other relation of

his poor wasted existence. He loved that girl, with a love that, for him, was very nearly unselfish. He thought of her and he dreamt of her. He lived day and night for her. He risked Kathleen's money recklessly for her sake on impossible outsiders, and backed the favourite at race after race, in utter disregard of worldly circumstances, in order to win her a princely income. That was about the highest point Reggie's industry, affection, and unselfishness could reach; in his way, he was raised above his own normal level. For Florrie he would almost have consented to wear an unfashionable coat, or to turn down his trousers when Bond Street turned them up, or to do anything, in fact, that a woman could wish—except curb his expenditure and lay by for the future.

So, for about eighteen months, things went on in this way: and then flying rumours began to flit about town that Spider Clarke of late had not been doing quite so well in his money-lending as usual. His star was waning. It was whispered at the clubs that, emboldened by his success with Algy Redburn, whom he was known to have financed during the tedious course of the Axminster peerage case, he had launched out too freely into similar speculations elsewhere, and had burnt his fingers over the monetary affairs of a very high personage. With bated breath, people mentioned his Serene Highness the Duke of Saxe-Weissnichtwo. Whether this was so or not, it is certain at least that Spider Clarke was less in repute in St. James's than formerly; the ladies who returned Mrs. Clarke's bows so coldly at the theatre, returned them now with the very faintest of possible inclinations, or affected to be turning their opera-glasses in the opposite direction, and not to notice her. Even

Captain Bourchier himself, whose suit had been pressed hard and warm at first, began to fancy it was a precious good thing that innocent-looking little Decoy Duck had played so fast and loose with him; for, as things were turning out now, he was confoundedly inclined to doubt whether the man who got her would get enough pickings with her to make it worth his while to give up that very mysterious entity he called his liberty. Henceforth, he was seen less and less often at Rutland Gate, and affected more and more at the Flamingo Club to speak of his relations with the Spiderette as a mere passing flirtation, that had never been meant to come to anything serious.

So matters went on till the end of the season. Meanwhile, the less Florrie saw of the accepted lover, the more and more did she see of the clandestine and romantic one. As for Reggie, he began to plan out a mighty scheme for winning himself fortune at a single stroke—a heroic investment of every penny he could raise, by pledging his slender credit, on a famous tip for the coming Cesarewitch. He intended to be rich, and to cut out that beastly Bourchier man, and to make himself a swell, and to marry Florrie. On the very afternoon when the news of his fortune was to reach London by telegram, however, he received a despatch at his office in the City which considerably disquieted him. Just at the first blush, to be sure, he thought it must be meant to announce the triumph of Canterbury Bell, whom he had 'backed for his pile'; but when he opened it, what he read was simply this:

'Come round to-night to see me; ask for me at the

hall door; important news; must speak with you. —FLORRIE.'

Mr. Reginald wondered much what this message could portend. He determined to go round to Rutland Gate at the earliest possible moment—as soon as he had satisfied himself that Canterbury Bell had behaved as he had a right to expect of such a filly, and that he was indeed the possessor of a marrying competence.

CHAPTER XVIII.

PRECONTRACT OF MATRIMONY.

THAT night was the most eventful of Mr. Reginald's life. For some weeks beforehand, indeed, he had lived in a perfect ferment of feverish excitement, intending, in his own expressive dialect, to 'pull off a double *coup*' on the day when Canterbury Bell provided him at one stroke with a colossal fortune. To say the truth, he held in his pocket, against this foregone contingency, a most important Document, which he designed to pull forth and exhibit theatrically to the obdurate Florrie at such a dramatic moment of triumph, that even Florrie herself would have nothing left for it but to throw overboard incontinently the cavalry officer, and fly forthwith to love in a cottage with her faithful admirer. Mr. Reginald had planned this all out beforehand in the minutest detail; and he had so little doubt of Canterbury Bell's ability to land him at once in fame and fortune, that he pulled forth

the Document many times during the course of the day, and read it through to himself once more with the intensest satisfaction.

Still, it's hard to wait for hours, slaving and toiling in an office in the City, when you know full well—on the unimpeachable authority of a private tip—that wealth and immunity are waiting for you all the while—to a moral certainty—at a bookmaker's at Newmarket. But necessity knows no law; and Mr. Reginald nathless so endured till five in the evening. By that hour he had reached the well-known office in the Strand where he was wont to await the first telegrams of results from the racecourses of his country. As he approached those fateful doors, big with hope and apprehension, a strange trembling seized him. People were surging and shouting round the window of the office in wild excitement. All the evil passions of squalid London were let loose there. But Mr. Reginald's experienced eye told him at once the deadly news that the favourite must have won—for the crowd was a joyous one. Now, the crowd in front of a sporting paper's office on the evening of a race day is only jubilant when the favourite has won; otherwise, of course, it stands morose and silent before the tidings of its failure. But Canterbury Bell was what Mr. Reginald himself would have described in the classic tongue of the turf—the muddy turf of Fleet Street—as 'a rank outsider,' for it is only by backing a rank outsider at heavy odds, 'on unexceptionable information,' that you can hope to haul in an enormous fortune at a stroke, without risking a corresponding or equal capital to start with. So the pæans of delight from the crowd that danced and yelled outside the office of the sporting paper made Reggie's heart sink

ominously. Could his tipster have played him false? It looked very much like it.

Worse and worse, as he drew nearer he could catch the very words of that jubilant cry—'The Plunger! The Plunger!' A hundred voices echoed it wildly to and fro in their excitement. The whole air was fairly rent with it—'The Plunger! The Plunger!!'

Now, the Plunger was the name of that wretched horse, the favourite! Reggie came up with bated breath. His heart stood still within him.

'What's won?' he asked a costermonger, who was shouting with the rest.

And the man, giving him a cool stare, made answer at once:

'Wy, can't you see it up there, you image? The Plunger! The Plunger!'

Reggie raised his eyes at once to the big lime-lit transparency on the front of the signboard, and read there his doom. It *was* The Plunger!

'And Canterbury Bell?' he gasped out, half clutching the man for support.

'Canterbury Bell!' the costermonger responded with an instinctive gesture of profound contempt. 'You 'aven't gone and risked yer money on Canterbury Bell, 'ave yer? Wy, Canterbury Bell was never in it at all. I could 'a told you that much if you'd 'a axed me aforehand. Canterbury Bell's a bloomin' fraud. She wan't meant to stay. She wan't never so much as in it.'

Reggie's brain reeled round. With a sickening sense of disillusion and disappointment, he clutched the Document in his pocket. Then all was up. He could never marry Florrie. The bubble had burst. He had

chucked away his bottom dollar on a 'blooming fraud,' as the costermonger called it. Life was now one vast blank. He didn't know where to turn for consolation and comfort.

His first idea, in fact, was to slink off, unperceived, and never keep the engagement with Florrie at all. What use was he now to Florrie or to anybody? He was simply stone-broke. Not a girl in the world would care for him. His second idea was to fling himself forthwith over Waterloo Bridge; but from that heroic cowardice he was deterred by the consideration that the water was cold, and if he did, he would probably drown before anyone could rescue him, for he was a feeble swimmer. His third and final idea was to go and tell Florrie every word of what had happened, and to throw himself, so to speak, on her generosity and her mercy.

Third ideas are best. So he went, after all, to Rutland Gate, much dispirited. A man-servant in a mood as dejected as his own opened the front door to him. Was Miss Clarke at home? Yes, the servant replied still more dejectedly than ever; if he liked, he could see her.

Reggie stepped in, all wonder. He rather fancied that man-servant, too, must have lost his all through the astounding and incomprehensible victory of The Plunger.

In the drawing-room, Florrie met him, very red as to the eyes. Her mien was strange. She kissed him with frank tenderness. Reggie stared wider than ever. It began to strike him that all London must have backed Canterbury Bell for a place, and gone bankrupt accordingly. Argentines were nothing to it. He had visions of a crash on 'Change to-morrow.

But Florrie held his hand in hers with genuine gentleness.

'Well, you've heard what's happened?' she said. 'You dear! and still you come to see me?'

'What? The Plunger?' Reggie ejaculated, unable to realize any save his own misfortune.

'The Plunger!' Florrie repeated in a vague sort of reverie. 'I'm sure I don't know what you mean. It's this about poor papa. Of course you've heard it?'

'Not a word,' Reggie answered, with a pervading sense that misfortunes, like twins, never come single. 'Has anything dreadful happened?'

'Anything dreadful?' Florrie echoed, bursting at once into tears. 'Oh, Reggie, you don't know! Everything dreadful! everything!' And she buried her fluffy head most unaffectedly in his shoulder.

Reggie was really too chivalrous a man, at such a moment, when beauty was in distress, to remember his own troubles. He kissed away Florrie's tears, as a man feels bound to do when beauty flings itself on him, weeping; and as soon as she was restored to the articulate condition, he asked, somewhat tremulous, for further particulars. For 'everything,' though extensive enough to cover all the truth, yet seems to fail somewhat on the score of explicitness.

'Look at the paper!' Florrie cried with another burst, all sobs. 'Oh, Reggie, it's too dreadful! I just *couldn't* tell you it.'

She handed him an evening journal as she spoke. Reggie glanced at the place to which her plump little forefinger vaguely referred him. The words swam before his eyes. This was truly astonishing: 'Arrest of the Well-known Money-lender, Mr. "Spider" Clarke, for Fraud and Embezzlement. Alleged

Gigantic System of Wholesale Forgery. Liabilities, Eighty Thousand; Probable Assets, Nil. The Spider's Web, and the Flies that filled it!'

Reggie read it all through with a cold thrill of horror. To think that Florrie's papa should have turned out a fraud, only second to Canterbury Bell, in whom he trusted! It was terrible, terrible! As soon as he had read it, he turned with swimming eyes of affection to Florrie. His own misfortunes had put him already into a melting mood. He bent down to her tenderly. He kissed her forehead twice.

'My darling,' he said gently, with real sympathy and softness, 'I'm so sorry for you! so sorry! But, oh, Florrie, I'm so glad you thought of sending for me.'

Florrie drew out a letter in answer from her pocket.

'And just to think,' she cried with flashing eyes, handing it across to him with indignation, 'that dreadful other man—before the thing had happened one single hour—the hateful, hateful wretch—he wrote me that letter! Did ever you read anything so mean and cruel? I know what to think of him now, and, thank goodness, I've done with him!'

Reggie read the letter through with virtuous horror. As poor Florrie observed, it was a sufficiently heartless one. It set forth, in the stiffest and most conventional style, that, after the events which had happened to-day before the eyes of all London, Miss Clarke would of course recognise how impossible it was for an officer and a gentleman and a man of honour to maintain his relations any longer with her family; and it therefore begged her to consider the writer in future as nothing more than hers truly,

PONSONBY STRETFEILD BOURCHIER.

Reggie handed it back with a thrill of genuine disgust. 'The man's a cad,' he said shortly; and, to do him justice, he felt it. Meanness or heartlessness of that calculated sort was wholly alien to Reginald Hesslegrave's impulsive nature.

'Thank you, Reggie,' Florrie said, drawing nearer and nearer to him. 'But you know, dear, I don't mind. I never cared one pin for him. After the first few weeks, when I thought of him beside *you*, I positively hated him. That's the one good thing that has come out of all this trouble; he won't bother me any more; I've got fairly rid of him.'

Reggie pressed her to his side.

'Florrie dear,' he whispered chivalrously, 'when you talk like that, do you know, you almost make me feel glad all this trouble has come—if it has had the effect of making us draw closer to one another.'

And that it had that effect at that present moment was a fact just then visibly and physically demonstrable.

Florrie laid the frizzy curls for a minute or two on his shoulder. In spite of her misfortunes, she was momentarily quite happy.

'I always loved you, Reggie,' she cried; 'and I can't be sorry for anything that makes you love me.' And she nestled to his bosom with the most confiding self-surrender.

This confidence on Florrie's part begot in return equal confidence on Reggie's. Before many minutes he had begun to tell that innocent, round-faced girl how narrowly he had just missed a princely fortune, and how opulent he would have been if only Canterbury Bell has behaved as might have been expected of so fine a filly.

'And it was all for you, Florrie,' he said ruefully, fingering the Document all the while in the recesses of his pocket. 'It was all for you, dear one! I thought I should be able to come round to you to-night in, oh such triumph, and tell you of my good-luck, and ask you to throw that vile Bourchier creature overboard for my sake, and marry me offhand—because I so loved you. And now it's all gone smash—through that beastly wretch, The Plunger.'

'Did you really think all that?' Florrie cried, looking up at him through her tears, and smiling confidingly.

'Do you doubt it?' Reggie asked, half drawing the Document from the bottom of his pocket.

'N-no, darling. I don't exactly *doubt* it,' Florrie answered, gazing still harder. 'But I wonder . . . if you will say it just now, so as to please me.'

Reggie's time had come. Fortune favours the brave. He held forth the Document itself in triumph at the dramatic moment. After all, it had come in useful. 'Read *that!*' he cried aloud in a victorious voice, like a man who produces irrefragable evidence.

Florrie gazed at the very official-looking paper in intense surprise. She hardly knew what to make of it. It was an instrument signed by the Right Reverend Father in God, the Archbishop of Canterbury; and it set forth in fitting terms his archiepiscopal blessing upon a proposed union between Reginald Francis Hesslegrave, Bachelor, of the Parish of St. Mary Abbot's Kensington, and Florence Amelia Barton Clarke, Spinster, of the Parish of Westminster.

Florrie gazed at it, all puzzled.

'Why, what does this mean, dearest?' she faltered out with emotion. 'I don't at all understand it.'

That was a proud moment for Reggie—about the proudest of his life.

'Well, it's called a special license, dear,' he answered, bending over her. 'You see, Florrie, I took it for granted Canterbury Bell was safe to win—as safe as houses—so I made up my mind to try a *coup* beforehand. I went to the surrogate and swore a declaration——'

'A what?' Florrie exclaimed, overcome by so much devotion.

'A declaration,' Reggie continued, 'don't you know—a sort of statement that we both of us wished to get married at once, and wanted a license; and here the license is; and I thought, when Canterbury Bell had won, and I was as rich as Crœsus, if I brought it to you, just so, you'd say like a bird: "Never mind my people; never mind Captain Bourchier. I've always loved you, Reggie, and now I'm going to marry you." But that beastly fool The Plunger plunged in and spoiled all. If it hadn't been for him, you might perhaps have been Mrs. Reginald Hesslegrave to-morrow morning. Mrs. Reginald Hesslegrave is a first-rate name, darling.'

Florrie looked up at him confidingly. She recognised the adapted quotation from a well-known poet.

'And it's no good now,' she said plaintively, 'since The Plunger put a stop to it!'

A gleam of hope dawned in Reggie's eyes. He was in a lover's mood: all romance and poetry.

'Well, the *license* is all right,' he said, taking Florrie's hand in his and smoothing it tenderly. 'The license is all right, if it comes to that. There's no reason, as far as the formalities go, why I shouldn't marry you, if you will, to-morrow morning.'

'Then what stands in the way?' Florrie inquired innocently.

'You,' Reggie answered at once, with a sudden burst of gallantry. 'You yourself entirely. Nothing else prevents it.'

Florrie flung herself into his arms.

'Reggie! Reggie!' she sobbed out, 'I love you with all my heart! I love you! I love you! You're the only man on earth I ever *really* loved. With you, and for your sake, I could endure anything—anything.'

Reggie gazed at her, entranced. She was really very pretty. Such eyes! such hair! He felt himself at that moment a noble creature. How splendid of him thus to come, like a modern Perseus, to the rescue of beauty—of beauty in distress at its hour of trial! How grand of him to act in the exact opposite way from that detestable Bourchier creature, who had failed at a pinch, and to marry Florrie offhand at the very time when her father had passed under a serious cloud, and when there was some sort of merit in marrying her at once without a penny of expectations! Conduct like that had a specious magnanimity about it which captivated Reginald Hesslegrave's romantic heart. The only point in the case he quite forgot to consider was the probability that Kathleen, unconsulted on the project, might be called upon to support both bride and bridegroom.

He clasped the poor panting little Decoy Duck to his bosom.

'Flossie dearest,' he murmured, '*I* have nothing; *you* have nothing; we have both of us nothing. We know now it's only for pure, pure love we can think of one another. I love you. Will you take me? Can you face it all out with me?'

Florrie hid her face yet once more in Reggie's best white waistcoat. He didn't even stop to reflect how she tumbled it.

'Darling! darling!' she cried. 'How unselfish—how noble of you!'

Reggie drew himself up with an ineffable sense of having acted, in difficult circumstances, like a perfect gentleman. He was proud of his chivalry.

'Then to-morrow,' he said briefly, 'we will be married with this license, as the Archbishop directs, at St. Mary Abbott's, Kensington.'

Florrie clung to him with all her arms. She seemed to have a dozen of them.

'Oh, you dear!' she cried, overjoyed. 'And at such a moment! How grand of you! How sweet! Oh, Reggie, now I know you are indeed a true gentleman!'

Reggie thought so himself, and stood six inches taller in his own estimation; though even before, Heaven had granted him a fairly good conceit o' himself.

CHAPTER XIX.

RE-ENTER MORTIMER.

It's an easy enough matter getting married in London, when you're carrying a special license for the purpose in your pocket: it smooths over the ingenious obstructions placed by English law in the way of matrimony; and Reggie, having once decided to perform, as he thought, this magnanimous action, saw no reason why he should not perform it at once, now the crisis had come, with the utmost expedition. So he

despatched an imaginative telegram to the office in the City next morning, announcing—with a lordly disregard of historical truth—that he was prevented by serious indisposition from attending to his work in Capel Court that day; after which little excursion into the realms of fiction, he met Florrie by appointment at the church door, where, accompanied only by Charlie Owen, who undertook the arduous duty of giving away the bride, he was duly married at St. Mary Abbott's, Kensington, to blushing little Florrie in her plain white flannel. (It came in quite handy, Florrie said, to be married in.)

Reggie was aware that he was performing a noble and generous act; and he looked fully conscious of it. As for Florrie, she thought nobody had ever been so heroic and so chivalrous as Reggie; and she felt prouder that morning, in her simple white frock, with her stockbroker's clerk, than if she had married the Commander-in-Chief himself, let alone a mere Captain in a distinguished cavalry regiment.

As soon as the ceremony was over, and Charlie Owen had evaporated, Reggie began to reflect seriously upon the lions in the path—the question of ways and means—the difficulties of supporting a wife and family. Stern critics might suggest that it was perhaps a few minutes late for taking that branch of the subject into consideration; but being now a married man, Reggie determined to face the duties of the situation as became his heightened dignity. He made up his mind at once to look out for some better paid post, and do his best to earn an adequate livelihood for Florrie. Meanwhile, however, and just as a temporary expedient, he decided—to ask a little passing assistance from his sister Kitty.

It was always so. Master Reggie danced; 'twas poor Kitty's place to pay the piper. Not that very day, of course. Hang it all, you know! a man may be allowed three days of honeymoon with the wife of his youth, before busying himself with the sordid mundane affairs of pounds, shillings, and pence, mayn't he? So Reggie resolutely determined to live in future a most quiet and saving life, and endeavoured to distract poor Florrie's mind in the interim from this horrid crash in her papa's affairs by spending the few remaining pounds he had still in pocket from last quarter's salary in taking her round to all the best burlesques then going on at the theatres. It didn't so much matter spending these few stray sovereigns like that, don't you see, because he meant to put his case plainly before Kitty next week, and get her to make him a last final loan on the strength of his new good resolutions as security; after which, he said to himself with the utmost firmness, he meant to reform altogether, and strike out a new line of economic action. Reggie was magnificent at good resolutions. The bother of it was, they all went to swell that nether pavement.

Now, it so happened that during those days Rufus Mortimer, too, who had been over in America for a year and a day, in part to distract himself from the effects of his disappointment, and in part to look after the ancestral engineering works, had returned to London, and had written to ask Kathleen's leave to visit her once more at her lodgings in Kensington—a smaller set, which she had occupied since her mother's death, and her consequent reduction of available income.

Kathleen always liked Rufus Mortimer. She knew

he was genuine. She recognised his goodness of heart and his true American chivalry; for where women are concerned, there is no person on earth more delicately chivalrous than your American gentleman. So, with sundry misgivings, she allowed Rufus Mortimer to call on her again, though she hoped he would not reopen the foregone conclusion she had settled that day on the Lido at Venice. And Rufus Mortimer for his part arrived at her rooms with a firm determination in his own mind not to ask Kathleen anything that might possibly be embarrassing to her feelings or sentiments. This first visit at least should be a purely friendly one; it should be taken up in discovering, by the most casual indications of straws on the wind, how Kathleen now felt towards her rejected lover.

But have you ever noticed that if you set out anywhere, fully determined in your own mind to conduct a conversation upon certain prearranged lines, you invariably find yourself at the end of ten minutes diverging entirely from the route you planned out for yourself, and saying the very things you had most earnestly decided wild horses of the Ukraine should never tear from you?

It was so with Rufus Mortimer. Before he had been ten minutes engaged in talk with Kathleen, he found conversation had worked round by slow degrees, of itself, to Venice; and when once it got to Venice, what more natural on earth than to inquire about old Venetian acquaintances? while, among old Venetian acquaintances, how possibly omit, without looking quite pointed, the name of the one who had been most in both their minds during that whole last winter on the Fondamenta delle Zattere? Rufus Mortimer felt there was no avoiding the subject. Like the moth with

the candle, he circled round and round, and at last dashed right into it.

'And Willoughby?' he asked after a pause, with a furtive side-look; 'have you never heard anything more, Miss Hesslegrave, about Willoughby?'

Kathleen's face flushed rosy red, but she gave no other sign of her suppressed emotion as she answered with a quiet resignation of manner:

'No; I've heard nothing more of him since he left Venice that April.'

Mortimer leaned forward eagerly. A bright light gleamed in his eye.

'What! he hasn't ever written to you?' he cried. 'Do you mean to say he hasn't written?'

Kathleen gazed at him pleadingly.

'No, Mr. Mortimer,' she answered in a very sad voice. 'He—he went away from Venice under circumstances which I can't quite explain in full to you; and from that day to this'—her lips quivered visibly—'I've never heard anything more of him.'

Mortimer clutched his two hands in one another nervously.

'Oh, how wrong of him!' he cried, with a timid glance at Kathleen. 'How unkind! How cruel! Why, Miss Hesslegrave, I should never have expected such conduct from Willoughby.'

'Nor I,' Kathleen admitted frankly, with a little burst of unreserve. It was such a relief to be able to talk about him to anybody who could understand, were it even but a little, her position. 'But then—oh, Mr. Mortimer, you don't know all. If you knew how unhappily and how strangely he was misled, you wouldn't be harsh in your judgment of him.'

'By—your mother?' Mortimer inquired, with a

flash of intuition—one of those electric flashes which often occur to men of the nervous temperament when talking with women.

Kathleen bowed her head.

'Yes, by my mother,' she answered softly.

There was a long deep pause. Then Mortimer spoke once more.

'That was eighteen months ago now,' he said, in a gentle undertone.

Kathleen assented.

'Yes, eighteen months ago.'

'And you've heard nothing more of him in any way since, directly or indirectly?'

'No, nothing,' Kathleen answered. Then she paused for a second, doubtful whether or not to utter the thought that was in her. 'Though I've tried every way I knew how,' she went on at last with an effort.

Mortimer turned to her gently. He was more like a woman than a man in his sympathy.

'You've been pressing this trouble down unconfessed in your own heart, Miss Hesslegrave,' he said with strange candour, yet strange gentleness of manner; for he came from one of those old Pennsylvanian Quaker families in which a certain feminine tenderness of nature may almost be reckoned as a hereditary possession. 'You've been pressing it down too long, till the repression has done you harm. It has told on your health. Why not confide in me frankly? You know me well enough to know that if there is any way in which it's possible for me to help you, I shall be more than repaid by the consciousness of having served you.'

'You're too good, Mr. Mortimer,' Kathleen answered.

the tears rising fast to her blinded eyes. 'I haven't deserved this from you. But you don't understand. You never *could* understand. For—well, for *his* sake I could never explain this matter to anybody. You see, it would be a real breach of confidence. There are points I can't explain, because—they're *his* secret.'

'And yet he has left you!' Rufus Mortimer exclaimed. 'While *I*—oh, Miss Hesslegrave!' He looked at her and held his peace. He was more in love with her than ever.

Kathleen rose and faced him.

'Dear Mr. Mortimer,' she said, with a faint tremor in her voice, 'we are no longer boy and girl. Why shouldn't I speak freely to you? You are very, very kind, more kind than I deserve; but—you mustn't talk like that to me. I love him still; I mustn't allow any other man to say such things to me about him. I like you, oh, ever so much, for all your kindness and sympathy; but I can't listen to you when you talk like that of *his* conduct. Please, please, don't do it.'

Mortimer leaned back again in his chair and looked hard at her.

'If *you* wish it,' he answered, 'I'll speak, or I'll be silent. Your will is law to me. I will do as you wish me. But I didn't come here to plead for myself to-day. All that shall be buried. Only, let me know whether it would help you to see him again. If it would, I'll hunt him out, though I have to tramp on foot over Europe to do it.'

'Yes, I want to see him again!' Kathleen answered, 'just once—if no more—to explain to him. He went away under a misapprehension that *she* had impressed upon him. So unjust! so untrue! And it's breaking my heart. I can't stand it, Mr. Mortimer.'

'I shall find him out,' Mortimer cried, rising; 'if he's to be found, I shall find him. In Europe, Asia. Africa, or America, I shall find him. Wherever he is, I'll track him. Miss Hesslegrave, I'll catch him by the neck and bring him to you.'

'You can't,' Kathleen answered. 'He has gone, like a shooting-star. He has left no trace behind. But I'm none the less grateful to you. You have always behaved to me as nobody else could have done.' She paused again for a second. 'If it were not for *him*'——she began; then she broke off, faltering.

'Thank you,' the American replied in a very low voice, supplying the missing words for himself without difficulty. 'I appreciate your kindness. I will do my best to find him. But if he never turns up again —if he has disappeared for ever—oh, Miss Hesslegrave, is there no chance—no hope for any other man?'

Kathleen gazed at him fixedly.

'No, no hope,' she answered with a visible effort. 'Mr. Mortimer, I like you; I respect you ever so much. But I love Arnold Willoughby. I could never give my heart to any man but him. And unless I gave my heart——'

'You are right,' Mortimer broke in. 'There we two are at one. I care for nothing else. It is your heart I would ask for.'

Trembling, he rose to go. But he held her hand long.

'And remember,' he said with a lump in his throat, 'if at any time you see reason to change your mind, I too have loved one woman too well in my time ever to love any other. I am yours, and yours only. One motion of your hand, and be sure I shall understand

it! He may die out of your life. You can't die out of mine. I shall always hope on, though no good come of hoping.'

He grasped her hand hard; Kathleen allowed him to grasp it. He stooped down and imprinted one kiss on the soft palm; she did not resent the action. She felt too well in what spirit he did it to feel called upon to prevent him. She had pity for his despair. Then he hurried down the stairs. His heart was too full for him to remain any longer. He could hardly hold back his tears, so deeply was he agitated.

On the doorstep he knocked up by accident against Reggie. The head of the house stopped the stranger quite eagerly.

'Hullo,' he exclaimed in some surprise; 'are *you* back again in England?'

'Yes, so it seems,' the American replied, trying to calm himself outwardly. 'I got back on Tuesday.'

'Last Tuesday as ever was?' Reggie cried.

'Yes, just so: last Tuesday.'

'And lost no time in hunting Kitty up!' Reggie went on, with a broad smile. This was really most promising. He knew the American, though an artist by choice, was reputed one of the richest business men in Philadelphia. It looked extremely healthy that he should have been in such a hurry to hunt up Kathleen.

'My first visit was to Miss Hesslegrave,' Mortimer answered with truth, feeling on his side the immense importance of conciliating Kathleen's only brother and sole surviving relation.

Reggie drew a long breath. Could anything have been more opportune? How pat comes fate! The moment had just arrived when he stood in sorest need of a wealthy brother-in-law; and now, in the nick of

time, on the very crest of opportunity, here was chance itself throwing the pick of wealthy brothers-in-law right in his path, as it were, like a crooked sixpence: for, though Rufus Mortimer tried to look and speak as unconcernedly as he could about his visit to Kitty, there was something in his voice and manner which showed Reggie quite clearly the nature of his errand at Kensington that morning. Reggie had suspected as much, indeed, since the first summer Mortimer spent in his own hired house in London; but it was plain as the sun in the sky to him that moment what he meant; if Kathleen chose she could marry the millionaire, and thereby confer on her loving brother the inestimable boon of a moneyed relation.

'I'm proud to hear it,' Reggie responded with warmth. 'She's a good girl, Kitty; and she's worth a fellow's calling upon. I like her myself. She's the very best sister any fellow ever hit upon.' Which was perfectly true, much more so, indeed, than Mr. Reggie himself ever fully realized.

So he mounted the stairs in a bland good-humour, the unpleasantness of having to confess his marriage to Kathleen being now much mitigated by the consoling consciousness that, if Kathleen chose, she could probably annex the richest American that moment in London. Most characteristically, too, Reggie thought of it all entirely from that one point of view; it wasn't really a question of a husband for Kitty, but of an eligible brother-in-law for Reginald Hesslegrave.

CHAPTER XX.

A FAMILY COUNCIL.

Reggie entered the room in the best of high spirits. They were confirmed by observing that Kitty had tears in her eyes—an excellent sign: she had evidently been crying. Hence Mr. Reggie acutely concluded that Mortimer must have proposed to her, and been refused for the moment, though not, of course, necessarily in a definitive fashion. Reggie was dimly aware, to be sure, as a brother may be, that there was Somebody at Venice; and he had drawn for himself the vague and formless inference that this Somebody, as he mentally put it in his own dialect, had failed to come up to the scratch with Kitty. Hence these weepings. But, then, girls are so stupid! If the fellow at Venice couldn't be brought to propose, why, it was clearly Kitty's duty, for her family's sake, to accept at once so eligible an offer as Rufus Mortimer's, especially when a brother could say, with Reggie, 'La famille, c'est moi!' Then her proper course shone forth with peculiar obviousness.

So Reggie entered his sister's room in the familiar fraternal mood of the man who isn't going to put up with any feminine nonsense.

Kathleen greeted him rather coolly. In point of fact, having just been deeply stirred, she was in no mood at the moment for receiving Reggie. She kept her eyes as much averted from her brother as possible, and strove to prevent them from catching Reggie's at awkward angles. Still, Reggie could see very well she had been crying, and could observe from her

manner that she was a good deal agitated. That was all most satisfactory. He dropped into an easy-chair with a careless fraternal air; and thinking it best to blurt the whole thing out at once without needless prologue, he looked across at her narrowly as he uttered the enigmatical words:

'Well, Kitty, I've come to receive your congratulations.'

'Congratulations?' Kathleen responded, taken aback. 'On what, my dear boy? Have they raised your salary?'

'Not they!' Reggie answered, smiling. 'Catch 'em at it! That's all! They never appreciate modest merit. Besides, I don't take much stock in stock-broking. The game ain't worth it, except, of course, for principals. No, Kitsy, it isn't that. It's something much more important.' He caressed his moustache. 'Can't you guess,' he said, 'what a man's most likely to ask his sister to congratulate him on?'

Kathleen's fears rose high at once. When Reggie wanted money, he addressed her as Kitty: but when it got to Kitsy, a most unusual diminutive of extreme affection, she felt sure he must mean to come down upon her for absolutely unprecedented advances.

'You're not engaged, are you, Reggie?' she faltered out in a feeble voice. 'For if you are, I'm sure it's very wrong indeed of you. You can't keep yourself, so you've surely no right to think of burdening me with someone else also.'

Reggie's lip curled slightly.

'What a girl you are!' he cried with a faint dash of disdain. 'Taking such a low monetary point of view about everything! One would think getting married

was a mere matter of £ s. d. Not a touch of sentiment in it. No, Kitsy, it isn't an engagement I want you to congratulate me on; it's something a vast deal more interesting and important.' Reggie drew himself up to his utmost height in his chair as he sat. 'The fact is, Kitty, I'm already married.'

'Married!' Kathleen exclaimed with a sudden burst of alarm. 'Oh, Reggie, what do you mean? Who is it? and when did you marry her?'

'Florrie Clarke,' Reggie answered, producing her photograph with just pride from his pocket—and, indeed, Florrie was a personable little body enough, whom anybody might be proud of from the point of view of external appearance. 'Who else could it be? We were married on Wednesday.'

Kathleen gazed at the portrait for a moment in silence. Her heart misgave her.

'Well, she looks a nice little thing,' she said after an ominous pause; 'and I should think a good girl, too: she's certainly pretty. But why didn't you tell me before, Reggie, and introduce your bride to me?'

'One's people are so unreasonable,' Reggie answered, with a hasty gesture. 'I don't blame it on *you*, Kitsy; I know you can't help it; it belongs to the race: it's only the fixed habit of the vertebrate animals one calls one's people.'

'Well, but she's such a good match from one point of view,' Kathleen went on, undoubtedly relieved to find Reggie had at least chosen a wife for himself from a well-to-do family; for the name and the fame of Spider Clarke had already reached her ears—as, indeed, whose had they not? 'Her people may not be very desirable acquaintances, so far as culture and manners go—I remember dear mother would never

let you bring them to her rooms while she lived—but at least they're wealthy, and that's always something. It will relieve you from responsibility. How on earth did you get Mr. Clarke to consent to the marriage?'

'We didn't get him,' Reggie answered with careless ease. 'We took the liberty, in point of fact, to dispense with asking him. Charlie Owen gave her away; and extremely paternal Charlie looked, I can tell you, as he stood up on his hind-legs in Kensington Church and did it.'

'But you haven't obtained Mr. Clarke's consent!' Kathleen cried, taken aback, and once more alarmed. 'Well, how can you tell, then, that he'll at all approve of it? Perhaps he'll refuse to do anything to help you.'

'Commercial again!' Reggie responded with an aggrieved air as of the poetical sentimentalist. 'Ingrainedly commercial! You talk like a greengrocer. You can't think of anything but the money aspect of the question. I call it sordid. Here's your brother, Kitsy—your own and only brother—comes to you with his full heart to announce to you in his joy that he's married to the sweetest, dearest, prettiest, cleverest, sauciest, most delicious little girl in all England; and what do you do? rush up to him, and kiss him, and rejoice with him, and congratulate him? Oh dear no! Not a bit of it! That's not your way. You begin by inquiring straight off what the lady's worth, and debating whether or not her papa will be inclined to fork out the dibs for her. However, there's a cure for all that, I'm jolly glad to say. Kitty, you're behind the times. You don't read the papers. You neglect the literature and the journalism of your country.'

'What do you mean?' Kathleen cried, trembling, and suspecting now some nameless evil. 'It hasn't been put in the papers? Oh, Reggie, don't say so! You haven't done anything dreadful and impossible, have you?'

'Me? Dear me, no, my dear child,' Reggie answered airily. 'I'm a model, myself, of all the domestic virtues. But the reason we didn't ask old Clarke's consent, my respected father-in-law's, is simply and solely this—that the respected father-in-law in question happens to be this moment lying in gaol, awaiting his trial on a charge of fraud of the first magnitude. That is all, my dear Kitty.'

'Fraud!' Kathleen exclaimed, drawing back. 'Oh, Reggie, you don't mean it. I thought he was so rich. What could *he* want to commit fraud for?'

'How do people get rich, I should like to know, if they don't begin by being fraudulent?' Reggie responded with easy-going cynicism. 'But he ain't rich; that's just it. Old Clarke's gone busted. *He's* no more good, any way. He's smashed eternally. Come a regular cropper, the Spider has. Precious awkward for poor Florrie!'

'But perhaps he's innocent,' Kathleen cried, clutching at a last straw. 'We should always think everybody innocent, dear mother used to say, till they're proved to be guilty.'

'Perhaps *you're* innocent,' Reggie echoed in a tone of half disgust, half amusement. 'Very innocent indeed. As innocent as they make 'em. But it won't do, Kitsy. It isn't good enough. Old Clarke's smashed up. He's gone a juicy one. Smashed himself, they say, over the Axminster estate. But anyhow, he's smashed; not a piece of him left whole.

Might have been better, don't you know, if he could have managed to clear out a good month ago to Buenos Ayres; but as it is, not a penny; not a dot; not a stiver. Twenty years is what he'll get. Florrie's awfully cut up about it.'

'And you've married her all the same?' Kathleen cried, clasping her hands, not without a certain internal tinge of pride, after all, that Reggie should at least have behaved like a gentleman.

Reggie drew himself up once more, and looked important. He stroked his moustache still more fondly than ever. Consciousness of rectitude shone from every line in his sleek round face.

'Why, of course I have,' he answered. 'What else could a fellow do? I hope I'm a gentleman. I went to her at Rutland Gate—telegram down to the City—"Come at once—deepest distress—must see you.—FLORRIE." And there I found the poor dear child in an agony of misery, crying and tearing her hair, which is short and black and one of her chief attractions. Seems she was just thrown overboard by a wretch of a cavalry man, whom her father and mother had compelled her to accept against her will instead of me. "Florrie," said I, "forget him, and come back to the arms of your one true lover." She flew to me like a bird, and nestled on my shoulder. "I'd marry you," said I, "if your father was ten thousand times a fraudulent bankrupt." And marry her I just did. So there's the long and the short of it.'

'You acted quite right,' Kathleen said, unable to resist a woman's natural approbation for the man who follows the impulse of his better nature.

Reggie seized his one chance. This was the thin end of the wedge.

'So I think,' he said complacently. 'And now the question is, how the dickens am I to pull through? I mean, what's to be done about ways and means? For of course, as you justly say, if I can't support myself, far less can I support myself and Florrie also.'

'But you should have thought of that beforehand,' Kathleen put in, drawing back.

It began to strike her that, after all, there was nothing so self-devoted in marrying a girl at a pinch if you propose to make your sister bear the burden of supporting her.

Thereupon they fell at once into committee of ways and means, relieved now and again by frequent declarations on Reggie's part that a sweeter, dearer, more bewitching girl than Florrie didn't really exist on the entire land-surface of this oblate spheroid.

Kathleen was glad he was so well suited with Spider Clarke's daughter, though she doubted the stock; and then, like a good woman that she was, reproached herself bitterly in her own mind for doubting it. But the longer they stuck at it, the less they seemed to arrive at any fixed decision. All Reggie could assert was his own absolute incapacity to earn a penny more than he was at present earning, coupled with the pleasing information that his exchequer was just now in its normally flaccid and depleted condition, and that his bills were (as always) in excess of his expectations. As for the Clarkes, Reggie observed with a complacent smile, they were simply stone-broke; a most jammy affair; not a penny need be looked for from that direction. The old man had spent his tin as fast as he made it, and faster; and now the crash had come, there were liabilities considerably in excess of the assets—a piece of information the technical sound of

which pleased Reggie so immensely that he repeated it over several times in various contexts for his sister's edification.

At last, however, he ventured bit by bit upon a tentative suggestion.

'There's only one way out of it,' he said, glancing sideways at Kathleen, 'and that lies entirely with you. If my creditors once learn I've got married without prospects, and to the Spider's daughter, why, they'll simply drop down on me. Scrunch, scrunch, they'll crush me. They'll press me for payment till I'm half mad with worry; and then I shall go and do one of two things—Waterloo Bridge or the Bankruptcy Court.'

'Oh, Reggie,' Kathleen cried, 'not Waterloo Bridge! How cruel! how wicked of you!'

Reggie saw his cue at once. That was the way, then, to work it. He enlarged forthwith upon the nothingness and hollowness of this present life, and the ease of ending it, as the poet observes, with a bare bodkin. For Florrie's sake, indeed, he could have wished it might be otherwise; but if no work were forthcoming, it would be easier for Florrie to starve alone than to starve in company. He dwelt upon these themes till he had thoroughly succeeded in frightening poor Kathleen. Then he turned upon her once more.

'And if you chose,' he cried bitterly, 'you could make it all right for me in a single minute.'

'How so?' Kathleen asked, trembling.

'Why, how about Mortimer?' Reggie cried, springing a mine upon her.

'Mortimer?' Kathleen repeated. 'How about Mr. Mortimer? Why, what on earth has he to do with the matter, Reggie?'

'Oh, you needn't look such a blessed innocent,' Reggie answered, smiling. '*I* know all about Mortimer. He'd propose to you like a shot, if only you'd have him. And for your family's sake, I say, it's your duty to have him. You know he would, as well as I do. So that's about the size of it.'

'Oh, Reggie, how can you?' Kathleen cried, the tears rising to her eyes. 'I could never marry him.'

'That's just as you like,' Reggie answered calmly. 'I don't want to bias you. If you prefer me to go over Waterloo Bridge, I'm sure I've no objection. I don't desire to be selfish, like some other people, and insist on having my own way, no matter who suffers for it. It's a very easy thing to take a header over the bridge in this nice warm weather. Only, for poor Florrie's sake, I confess I should have preferred to fight it out in this world a little longer.'

'But I'm *not* selfish,' Kathleen cried, hit on her tenderest point. 'Oh, Reggie, don't say you think me selfish. I'd do anything to serve you, dear, except only that. But that one thing I can't. Oh, Reggie, don't ask it of me.'

She spoke with so much earnestness that Reggie saw he had a chance of gaining his point if he went on with it resolutely. So he answered in a sullen voice:

'Oh yes, of course; you'd do anything on earth except the one thing that's any use to try. That's always the way with people. They'd kill themselves to help you; but they won't stretch out a hand in the only direction possible. You'd sooner see your brother starve, or drive him to suicide, than make an effort to help him by marrying Rufus Mortimer.'

'Reggie,' Kathleen exclaimed, driven to bay, 'you

don't understand. I love somebody else; that's why I can't marry him.'

'So I gathered,' Reggie answered with perfect coolness. 'And the somebody else won't come up to the scratch; so you may as well regard him as a vanishing factor, as we say in the City. He's out of the running. Well, then accept it. What's the matter with Rufus Mortimer? that's what *I* want to know. He's rich; he's a gentleman; he's good-looking; he's artistic; he's everything else on earth any woman could want, except—well, except that he's not the other fellow. Are you going to let your brother go and die before your eyes, just because you won't take a man any girl but you would be delighted to have a chance of?'

'Oh, Reggie, how dreadful of you!' Kathleen cried. 'I can't bear to hear you speak of it all as if it were a mere matter of business arrangement. I *love* the other man; I don't love Mr. Mortimer.'

'He's a very good fellow,' Reggie answered, hand on lip once more. 'If only you made up your mind to it, you'd soon learn to like him.'

'I like him already,' Kathleen admitted frankly. 'He's a very nice fellow; a dear good fellow; so kind, so generous, so chivalrous, so unselfish.'

'Well, there you are,' Reggie replied, folding his hands resignedly. 'If you feel like that towards him already, why, of course, if you got engaged, you'd very soon be in love with him.'

'I could never be out of love with the other,' Kathleen faltered, half wavering.

'That's *quite* unimportant,' Reggie answered with equal frankness. 'As long as you feel you can marry Mortimer, I'd leave the other man to stand his own

chance, like Jamie in the poem. You wouldn't be the first woman—nor the last by a long chalk—who has married her second best, and jogged along very well with him.'

'I'm afraid that's true,' Kathleen responded, sighing. And indeed it was. 'Tis the tragedy of our century.

'Well, I'm going soon,' Reggie observed, starting up with a theatrical air. 'And if you should happen to hear the newsboys calling out to-morrow morning, "Shockin' Suicide of a Gentleman from Waterloo Bridge!" don't let it give you a turn. I'm not worth bothering about.'

'Reggie,' Kathleen cried, clinging to him, 'you mustn't go like that. I am afraid to let you go. You make me so frightened. Promise me you'll do nothing silly till you've seen me again. If you will, I'll think it over, and try what I can to help you. But you must promise me faithfully. Oh, Reggie, do promise me.'

'I don't know whether I can,' Reggie responded dubiously.

'You must,' Kathleen exclaimed. 'Oh, Reggie, you frighten me. Do promise me you won't, and I'll try to think it over.'

'Well, I'll wait till to-morrow, and then I'll see you again,' Reggie answered doggedly. 'But, mind, I only say till I see you to-morrow.'

Kathleen trembled all over.

'Very well, dear,' she answered. He was her only brother, and with that wonderful tie of blood which binds us all to the foolishest or worst of mankind, she was very, very fond of him.

Reggie turned from the threshold with his hand on the door-plate.

'Oh, by the way,' he said casually, 'you don't happen to have such a thing as a couple of sovereigns you could lend me, just for Florrie's immediate necessities; bread and cheese, and so forth; till we've decided this question, and I know whether I'm to go over the bridge or not, and whether her address in future is to be Kensington Workhouse?'

Kathleen pulled out her scanty purse, now entirely replenished by her own earnings as an artist, and drew from it two sovereigns, which she handed him regretfully. She had made up her mind a hundred times over already she would never be silly enough to lend him money again; and here, for the hundred and first time, she found herself doing it.

'Thanks,' Reggie said with careless ease, dropping them into his waistcoat pocket, as though money were nothing to him. 'Well, good-evening, Kitsy. Think it over by yourself; and don't let your sentimental fancy drive your brother to despair; that's all I beg of you.'

After which, being worn out with this painful interview, and feeling the need of rest and amusement, he stopped at the box office of the Court Theatre on his way down town, and engaged two stalls for that night for himself and Florrie.

CHAPTER XXI.

THE WISE WOMAN.

As soon as Reggie was gone, poor Kathleen delivered herself over to pure unadulterated searchings of spirit. The world, indeed, is pretty equally divided between

people who have no scruples of conscience at all, and people who allow their scruples of conscience to run away with them. Now, Kathleen Hesslegrave belonged to the latter unfortunate self-torturing class. She had terrible fears of her own as to what she should do about Reggie. Of course, no outsider who knew Mr. Reginald's character as well as she did would ever for a moment have been silly enough to believe he really contemplated suicide; he was far too much of a physical and moral coward ever to dream of jumping over Waterloo Bridge; for though it may be cowardly in one sense to run away from the responsibilities and difficulties of life, yet none the less it is often still deeper cowardice that prevents many people from having recourse to that cowardly refuge. To Kathleen, however, the danger envisaged itself as a real and menacing one. When it comes to one's own relations, one is more credulous in these matters, and more timorous of giving the slightest handle for offence. The threat of suicide is the easiest form of thumbscrew that a selfish, unscrupulous, and weak-minded lad can apply to the moral feelings of his relations.

Moreover, Reggie had happened upon a fortunate moment. When he called that day, Kathleen had just been deeply impressed by Rufus Mortimer's goodness and generosity; indeed, she had said to herself, as Rufus Mortimer left the room: 'If only I had never met Arnold Willoughby, I really believe I could have loved that man dearly.' So when Reggie began to throw out his dark hints of approaching suicide, Kathleen seriously debated in her own mind whether or not it was her duty to save him from such a fate by marrying the man who had shown himself so truly

and disinterestedly devoted to her. All that night, she lay awake and reasoned with herself wearily. Reggie wasn't worth all the trouble she bestowed upon him. Early next morning she rose, and wrote him in haste half a dozen long letters, one after the other, all of which she tore up as soon as she had finished them. It *is* so hard to know what to do in such difficult circumstances. Kathleen wondered and waited and argued with her own heart, and worried her poor conscience with interminable questions.

After breakfast, a light burst upon her. Why not go and talk the whole matter over with Mrs. Irving? Now, Mrs. Irving was a friend whose acquaintance she had made some years before on the quays at Venice; a painter like herself, older, and cleverer, and a great deal more successful. Her face was beautiful, Kathleen always thought, with the beauty of holiness; a chastened and saddened face, with marks of its past stamped deep upon its features. Her silvery hair was prematurely gray; but the light in her eye showed her younger by a decade than one might otherwise have judged her. It was a happy inspiration on Kathleen's part to go to her; for when a girl is in doubt, she can seldom do better than take the advice of some older woman in whom she has confidence, and who can look at the matter at issue from the impersonal standpoint. 'Tis that very impersonality that is so important an element in all these questions; you get rid of the constant disturbing factor of your own emotions.

Now, a certain halo of mystery always surrounded Mrs. Irving. Who Mr. Irving was, or whether, indeed, there was still or was not a Mr. Irving at all, Kathleen never knew. Whenever their talk had approached

that topic, Kathleen noticed that her friend glided carefully over the thin ice in the opposite direction, and distracted the conversation by imperceptible degrees from Mr. Irving's neighbourhood. Nevertheless, there had been always some surmise and gossip about the hypothetical husband at Venetian tea-tables; for you may take it as an invariable rule in life, that whenever a woman, no matter how innocently, lives apart from her husband, she will always abide under the faint shadow of a social cloud; let it be twenty times his fault, and twenty times her misfortune, yet it is she, and not he, who will have to pay the price for it. So the petty world of English Venice had always looked a little askance at Mrs. Irving as 'a woman, don't you know, who's living apart from her husband'—and then, with an ugly sneer—'that is to say, if she has one.' But to Kathleen, the beautiful woman with the prematurely gray hair was simply the dearest and kindest of friends, the most trustworthy person she had ever come across.

It was to Mrs. Irving, then, that Kathleen went at once to impart her difficulty about Reggie and Rufus Mortimer. Her friend listened to her with tender interest and instinctive sympathy. As soon as Kathleen had finished, the elder woman rose and kissed her forehead affectionately.

'Now tell me, dear,' she said, gazing into Kathleen's frank eyes, 'if your sailor were to come back to you, would you love him still?' For Kathleen had only described Arnold Willoughby's reasons for leaving Venice in the most general terms, and had never betrayed his secret as to the Earldom of Axminster.

'I love him *now*, as it is,' Kathleen answered candidly: 'of course I should love him then. I love him

better than I did before he left me, Mrs. Irving. I seem to love him more the longer he stays away from me.'

'And you don't love Mr. Mortimer?' Mrs. Irving said once more.

'No,' Kathleen answered. 'I only like him and respect him immensely. But Reggie seems to think that's all that's necessary.'

The security was insufficient; but 'tis so that good women will bow to the opinion of their men relations. Mrs. Irving took the girl's two hands between her own caressingly. A beautiful middle-aged woman, with soft wavy hair, and that chastened loveliness which comes to beautiful women with the touch of a great sorrow, she revolted in soul against this fraternal despotism.

'Reggie!' she cried with a little contempt in her tone. 'What has Reggie to do with it? It's yourself and the two men and the essential truth of things you have to reckon with first. Kathleen, dear Kathleen, never believe that specious falsehood people sometimes would foist upon you about the unselfishness of marrying a man you don't really love, for the sake of your family. It isn't unselfishness at all; it's injustice, cruelty, moral cowardice, infamy. The most wrong thing any woman can do in life is to sell herself for money where her heart is untouched. It's not merely wrong; it's disgrace; it's dishonour. Out of the bitterness of my heart, my mouth speaketh. Shall I tell you my own story, dear? It happened in this way. When I was young, very young—only just seventeen—my mother was left with a tiny little income. It was almost less than would keep us three alive, herself and me and my sister Olive. Then

Colonel Irving saw me, and was taken with me for the moment; he was a very rich man, years older than myself, and one of the biggest officials on the Council in India. He proposed to me. I was frightened, though, girl-like, I was flattered; and I told my mother. Instead of telling me to avoid the snare, she begged and prayed me to accept him.

'"But I don't love him," I said.

'"You will," my mother answered.

'I knew I was doing wrong; but when one's only seventeen, one hardly quite realizes that when you marry once you marry for a lifetime. I accepted him at last, under that horrid mistaken notion that I was sacrificing myself nobly for my mother's sake, and was so very unselfish. He took me out to India. For a year or two we lived together, not happily, indeed—I can never say it was happily, but without open rupture. Then Colonel Irving saw plainly that, though he had bought me and paid for me, I didn't and couldn't love him. I did my best, it's true, to carry out as far as I could that wicked and cruel bargain; I tried to like him; I tried to act fairly to him. But all the time I felt it was degradation, misery, pollution, wickedness. And *he* saw it too. I have no word of blame for him. At last, one morning, he disappeared suddenly, and left a note behind him. He had gone off to Europe, and—somebody else had gone with him.'

'And then?' Kathleen asked, bending forward.

'Well, then, dear, I felt it was all over, and I knew it was my fault, because I hadn't had the moral courage at first to say *no* outright to him. I did what no woman ought ever to do—let him take my hand when my heart was not his; and I had to pay the penalty

of it. And so will you, too, if you do as I did. One way or the other, you will have to pay the penalty. He was just to me after his lights; severely just—I might almost say generous; he offered to make me an allowance of half his income. But I wrote back and said no. I would never again take a penny that was his. I would earn my own living. So I began at art, in a small way at first; and I worked on at it with a will till I could keep myself easily. Then I did more than that. I worked and saved till I could send him one day a cheque for every penny he had ever spent upon me. He refused to receive it. I refused to take it back. I sent the money, in his name, in gold, to his banker's. He wouldn't touch it. And there it lies to this day, and neither of us will claim it.'

'That was splendid of you!' Kathleen cried.

'No, my dear; it was just. Nothing more than bare justice. I had made a hateful bargain, which no woman should ever make, for the sake of her own dignity, her own purity, her own honour; and I was bound to do the best I could do to unmake it. But I tell you all this now, that you may see for yourself how wrong it is for any woman to do as I did; that you may learn to avoid my mistake betimes, Reggie or no Reggie, while it may yet be avoided.'

'You're right,' Kathleen said, drawing back with a sudden flash of conviction. 'It's debasing and degrading, when one fairly faces it. But what am I to do? Reggie declares if I don't marry Mr. Mortimer he'll commit suicide instantly. He's in a dreadful state of mind. I had to make him promise last night he wouldn't do anything rash till he saw me to-day; and even now I don't know what he may have done mean-

while, as soon as he got alone, and was left by himself with his remorse and misery.'

'Reggie!' Mrs. Irving exclaimed, with a sudden melodious drop from the sublime to the ridiculous. 'Oh, my dear, don't you trouble your head for a moment about *him*. He's as right as ninepence. *He's* not going to commit suicide. Remorse and misery! Why, I was at the Court Theatre in the boxes last night, and there, if you please, was Master Reggie in the stalls, with a pretty young woman, close-cropped and black-haired, with a cheek like a ripe peach, who, I suppose, was his Florrie. They were eating Neapolitan ices all through the interlude, and neither of them seemed to have the slightest intention of committing suicide in the immediate future.'

That was a fortunate accident for Kathleen. It relieved her mind immensely for the moment; it decided her that Mrs. Irving's advice was sound, and that she would be doing injustice to her own higher nature if, for Reggie's sake, she accepted the man she didn't love, to the exclusion of the man she loved so dearly.

But while Kathleen was discussing this matter thus earnestly with Mrs. Irving, her brother Reggie, on his way down to the City, had managed to drop in for a few minutes' conversation with Rufus Mortimer at his house in Great Stanhope Street. He had called, indeed, for a double diplomatic purpose, cloaked beneath a desire to see Mortimer at dinner with his wife on Saturday.

'Our rooms are small,' Reggie said airily, with the consummate grace of a great gentleman extending an invitation to a lordly banquet in his ancestral halls; 'we've hardly space for ourselves even to turn about

in them; and as to swinging a cat, why, it would almost amount to culpable cruelty. But we should be delighted to see you at our *annexe*, the Criterion—first door on the right as you enter the big gate—dinner *à la carte*, best of its kind in London. Half-past seven, did I say? Yes, that will suit us admirably. Florrie's longing to see you, I've told her so much about you.'

'Why?' Mortimer asked, with a smile, half guessing the reason himself.

Reggie smirked and hesitated.

'Well, I thought it not improbable from what I saw and heard,' he answered at last with affected delicacy, 'that we might—in future—under certain contingencies—see a good deal more of you.'

And he looked at his man meaningly.

Rufus Mortimer was reserved, as is the American habit; but he couldn't help following out this decided trail. By dexterous side-hints, he began questioning Reggie as to Kathleen's intentions; whereupon Reggie, much rejoiced that Mortimer should so easily fall into his open trap, made answer in the direction that best suited his own interests. He rendered it tolerably clear by obscure suggestions that Kathleen had once been in love, and still considered herself to be so; but that, in her brother's opinion, the affection was wearing out, was by no means profound, and might be easily overcome; moreover, that she cherished for Rufus Mortimer himself a feeling which was capable of indefinite intensification. All this Reggie hinted at great length in the most roundabout way; but he left in the end no doubt at all upon Rufus Mortimer's mind as to his real meaning. By the time Mr. Reginald rose to go, Mortimer was quite convinced that he

might still win Kathleen's heart, and that her brother would be a most powerful auxiliary in his campaign, to have secured whose good-will was no slight advantage.

At the door Reggie paused.

'Dear me!' he said, feeling abstractedly in his waistcoat pocket; 'I've left my purse at home, and I meant to take a cab. I'm late already, and now I'll have to tramp it. That's a dreadful nuisance, for they're death on punctuality at our office in the City.'

'Can I lend you a few shillings?' the unsuspecting American asked, too innocent to see through Mr. Reginald's peculiar tactics.

'Oh, thanks, awfully,' Reggie answered in his nonchalant way, as if it were the smallest matter in the world. 'I should be glad of a sovereign. I can pay it back on Saturday when we meet at the Criterion.'

'I've nothing less than a fiver,' Mortimer observed, drawing it out.

Reggie's hands closed over the piece of paper like a shot.

'Oh, it's all the same,' he replied, with a smile he could hardly suppress, sticking it carelessly into his pocket. 'I'm awfully obliged to you. It's so awkward to go out without one's purse in London. Ta-ta, then, till Saturday.'

'He's going to be my brother-in-law,' Reggie thought complacently to himself as he descended the stairs; 'and, after all, a gentleman may borrow any day from his brother-in-law.'

So firmly did he act upon this prospective relationship, indeed, that this was only the first of many successive fivers, duly entered in Rufus Mortimer's book

of expenditure as 'Advanced on loan to K. H.'s brother.' But notes of their repayment on the credit side were strangely absent.

Nay, so much elated was the honest-hearted young American at this fraternal visit, with the opportunity it afforded him of doing some slight service to a member of Kathleen's family, that, as soon as Reggie was gone, he sat down and indited a letter full of love and hope to Kathleen herself, declaring that he would honestly do his best to find Arnold Willoughby, but asking with much fervour whether, if he failed in that quest, there would yet be any chance for any other suitor. He wrote it in a white heat of passionate devotion.

It was a letter that Kathleen could not read without tears in her eyes; for no woman is unsusceptible to the pleasure of receiving a declaration of love, couched in ardent terms, from a man she can respect and admire, even if she cannot accept him. But she sat down, none the less, and answered it at once, with tenderness and tact, in the decided negative.

'Your letter has touched me deeply,' she said, 'as all your kindness always does; and if I could say *yes* to any man, apart from Him, I could say *yes* to you, dear Mr. Mortimer. If I had never met Him, I might perhaps have loved you dearly. But I have loved one man too well in my time ever to love a second; and whether I find him again or not, my mind is quite made up—I cannot and will not give myself to any other. I speak to you frankly, because from the very first you have known my secret, and because I can trust and respect and like you. But if ever I meet

him again, I shall be his, and his only; and his only I must be if I never again meet him.'

Mortimer read the letter with dim eyes; then he folded it up with reverence, and placed it securely in a leather case in his pocket. There he carried it for many days, and often looked at it. Rejection though it was, it yet gave him a strange delight to read over and over again those simple words:

'If I could say *yes* to any man, apart from Him, I could say *yes* to you, dear Mr. Mortimer.'

CHAPTER XXII.

ISLES OF WINTER.

Arnold Willoughby had a strong constitution; but that second summer in the Northern seas told upon his health even more seriously than all his previous seafaring. Perhaps it was the result of his great disappointment; perhaps it was the sense of nothing left in this life to live for; but, at any rate, he grew thin and weak, and lost heart for his work, in a way that was unusual with so vigorous a sailor. The skipper, as he looked at him, thought Willoughby wouldn't ever be fit for another sealing voyage—thought it in that hard, purely objective way that is habitual to skippers in dealing with seamen. And Arnold Willoughby himself began to recognise the fact that he was growing ill and worn with these continued hardships. Life had been a failure for him. His day was over. He was one of those, he feared, who must go to the wall

in the ceaseless struggle for life which nature imposes upon us.

But, at any rate, he would go to the wall like a man—he would live or die on his own poor earnings. He never went back for a moment upon the principles he had established for himself in early manhood. From the day when he saw his cousin Algy's claim admitted in full by the House of Lords, he considered himself as nothing more than Arnold Willoughby, an able-bodied seaman—and not even that now, as things were taking him. Yet he was himself, for all that. Even though you go sealing on the Greenland coasts, you can't quite get rid of the cultivated habits and tastes of a gentleman. Arnold Willoughby, for his part, never desired to get rid of them. He loved the things of the mind in spite of everything. During his earlier years of apprenticeship to the perils of the sea, he had yearned for art; now he had given up art for the moment, he took in its place to literature. The sailors in the fo'c'sle of the *Sheriff Ivory*, of Dundee, were much amused from time to time at Willoughby's rummy way of writing at odd moments in a pocket-book he kept by him; and, indeed, at all spare hours he was engaged by himself in a curious piece of work whose meaning and import the average mariner's mind could hardly fathom. He was deciphering and translating the Elizabethan English sailor's manuscript which he had picked up by accident in the little shop at Venice.

He did it merely to please himself; and therefore he was able to spend a great deal more time and trouble over doing it to perfection than he could possibly have spent if he were one of the miserable drudges who live by the professional pursuit of letters under our hard-faced *régime*. He translated it care-

fully, lovingly, laboriously. Day after day in his spare moments he took out a page at a time, and transcribed and Englished it with studious pains in his little pocket note-book. For two seasons he had gone on with this amateur authorship, if such it might be called; and towards the end of the second he had pretty fairly finished his allotted taskwork.

But the fo'c'sle of a sealer in full pursuit of oil is by no means an ideal place for literary composition. Many a time and oft Arnold was interrupted by rude pleasantries or angry calls; many a time he was delayed by the impossibility of finding room for a few minutes' work even on so humble a basis. At last, one afternoon, towards the close of the sealing season, he was told off with a dozen other men for a run in a boat down the ice-bound coast in search of fresh sealing-grounds. His party were on the look-out for Greenland seals, which usually bask and flounder in the sun on the blocks in ice-floes; and they had rowed to a considerable distance from their ship without perceiving any 'fish,' as the sealers call them. Their road lay through a floating mass of blue crystalline ice-blocks. At last the pack grew too thick for them to penetrate any further, and the bo'sun in charge, blowing his whistle from the stern, gave the word to return to the *Sheriff Ivory*. They rowed back again about half a knot, in full sight of their ship, when it became gradually apparent that they were becoming surrounded by icebergs. A change in the wind brought them along unexpectedly. One after another, the great white mountains loomed up and approached them from all sides, apparently sailing in every direction at once, though really, of course, only veering with the breeze from different quarters in the same

general direction. The bo'sun looked at them with some dislike. 'Ah doan't care for bergs,' he said in his thick Sunderland dialect. 'Tha've got naw pilot aboord.' And, indeed, the icebergs seemed to be drifting in every direction, hither and thither at random, without much trace of a rudder. Closer and closer they drew, those huge glacial islands, two large ones in particular almost blocking the way to the ship in front of them. The bo'sun looked at them again. 'Toorn her aboot, boys,' he said once more in a very decided way. 'Easy all, bow side: row like blazes, you oother uns! Ah'm thinkin' we'll naw be able to break through them by that quarter.'

The men turned the boat instantly in obedience to his word, and began rowing for their lives in the opposite direction. It was away from the ship; but, in their present strait, the first thing to be thought of was avoiding the pressing danger from the icebergs at all hazards. By-and-by the bo'sun spoke again. 'Ah'm thinkin',' he said slowly, 'tha're toornin' themsel's this way, mates.'

Arnold Willoughby glanced round. It was only too true. The icebergs, which were two enormous blocks of white shimmering crystal, half a mile or more in length, had shifted their course somewhat, and were now coming together, apparently both behind and in front of them. The boat lay helpless in a narrow channel of blue water between the high walls of ice that glistened in the sun like chalk cliffs in August. At the rate the bergs were moving, it would take only some ten or twelve minutes for them to shock and shiver against one another's sides. The prospect was appalling. Human arms could hardly carry the boat free of their point of contact before they finally

collided. In that moment of danger, not a word was spoken. Every man saw the peril for himself at once, and bent forward to the long sweeps with terrible intensity of energy. Meanwhile, those vast moving islands of ice came resistlessly on, now sailing ahead for a moment before a gust of wind, now halting and veering again with some slight change in the breeze. Yet, on the whole, they drew steadily nearer and nearer, till at last Arnold Willoughby, looking up, saw the green crystal mountains rising almost sheer above their heads to the terrific height of several hundred feet like huge cliffs of alabaster.

'Noo look out, boys,' the bo'sun cried in a solemn voice of warning. 'Tha'll strike afore long.' And every eye in the boat was fixed at once, as he spoke, on the approaching monsters.

Scarcely room was left between them for the boat to pass out; and she was still many yards from the point where the blue channel between the bergs began to widen again. A sort of isthmus of water, a narrow open strait, intervened between them and the wider part of the interval. Two clashing capes of ice obstructed it. On and on came the great mountains of glistening white crystal, tall, terrible, beautiful, in irresistible energy. The men crouched and cowered. Arnold Willoughby knew their last moment had come. There was no way out of it now. In another second the bergs would crash together with a thunder of the sea; their little cock-boat would be shivered to fragments before the mighty masses of the jarring ice-mountains; and they themselves, mere atoms, would be crushed to a pulp as instantly and unconsciously as an ant is crushed under the wheel of a carriage. Not a man tried to pull another stroke at the oars. Every

eye was riveted on the horrible moving deaths. Their arms were as if paralyzed. They could but look and look, awaiting their end in speechless terror.

At that awful moment, just before the unconscious masses struck and shivered into pieces, a flood of strange thought broke at once over Arnold Willoughby's mind. And it summed itself up in the thousandfold repetition of the one word Kathleen, Kathleen, Kathleen, Kathleen.

He thought it over and over again, in a sudden agony of penitence. With a rush, it burst in upon him that he had done wrong, grievously wrong, to be so hasty and impulsive. What misery he might have caused her! What injury he might have inflicted! After all, no man can ever be quite certain even in his interpretation of the most seemingly irresistible facts. What wrong he might have done her—ah, heaven, now irrevocable! Irrevocable! Irrevocable! For the mighty masses of ice stood above them like precipices on the brink of falling; and in one second more they would shock together——

Crash! Crash! Crash! Even before he had finished thinking it, a noise like thunder, or the loud rumble of an earthquake, deafened their ears with its roar, redoubled and ingeminated. The bergs had met and clashed together in very truth, and all nature seemed to clash with them. A horrible boiling and seething of the water around them! A fearful shower of ice shot upon them by tons! And then, just before Arnold Willoughby closed his eyes and ceased to think or feel, he was dimly aware of some huge body from above crushing and mangling him helplessly. Pains darted through him with fierce spasms; and then all was silence.

Half an hour passed away before Arnold, lying still, was again conscious of anything. By that time he opened his eyes, and heard a voice saying gruffly:

'Why, Willoughby ain't killed neither! He's a-lookin' about him.'

At sound of the voice, which came from one of his fellow-sailors, Arnold strove to raise himself on his arm. As he did so another terrible shoot of pain made him drop down again, half unconscious. It occurred to him dimly that his arm must be broken. Beyond that he knew nothing, and he lay there long, nobody taking, for the time, any further notice of him.

When he opened his eyes a second time he could see very well why. They were still surrounded by whole regiments of icebergs, and the remaining valid men of the crew were still rowing for dear life to get clear of the danger. But one other man lay worse crushed than himself, a mangled mass of clotted blood and torn rags of clothes at the bottom of the boat; while a second one, by his side, still alive, but barely that, groaned horribly at intervals in the throes of deadly agony.

Arnold lay back once more, quite passive all the while as to whether they escaped or were engulfed. He was weak and faint with pain; and so far as he thought of anything at all, thought merely in a dim way that he would like to live if only for one thing—to see Kathleen Hesslegrave.

Hours passed before he knew what had really happened. It was a curious accident. An iceberg is a huge floating mass of ice, only an insignificant part of which shows visible above water. The vastly greater portion is submerged and unsuspected. It is impos-

sible, of course, to guess at the shape of this submerged part, any more than one could guess at the shape of the submerged part of a piece of ice, as it bobs up and down in a glass, by observation of the bit that protrudes above the water. These particular icebergs, however, had such exceptionally sheer and perpendicular sides that they looked like huge fragments of an extended ice-field broken off laterally; they seemed to show that the submerged portion was flush with the cliffs they exhibited above water. Had that been quite so, Arnold Willoughby's boat could never have escaped complete destruction. It would have been stove in and crushed between the great colliding walls like a nut under a steam-hammer. But as it happened, the submerged block was slightly larger in that direction than the visible portion; and the bergs thus crashed together for the most part under water, causing a commotion and eddy which very nearly succeeded in swamping the boat, and which rendered rowing for a minute or two wholly impossible. At the same time, a projecting pinnacle that jutted out above from the face of the cliff came in contact with another part of the opposing iceberg, and, shivering into fragments a hundred yards away from them, broke up with such force that many of its shattered pieces were hurled into the boat, which they, too, threatened to swamp, but which fortunately resisted by the mere elasticity of the water about them.

For a minute or two, all on board had been tumult and confusion. It was impossible for those who were less seriously hurt to decide offhand upon the magnitude of the disaster, or to tell whether the bergs, recoiling with the shock, might not wheel and collide again, or lose balance and careen, sucking them under

as they went with the resulting eddy. As a matter of fact, however, the collision, which had been little more than a mere sideward gliding, like the kiss of a billiard ball, was by no means a serious one. The two moving mountains just touched and glanced off, ricocheting, as it were, and leaving the boat free in a moment to proceed upon her course. But as soon as the bo'sun could collect his wits and his men for a final effort, he found that one was dead; while two more, including Arnold Willoughby, lay wounded and senseless at the bottom of the gig—whether actually dead or only dying, they knew not.

Summoning up all their remaining nerve, the uninjured men seized their oars once more, and rowed for dear life in the direction of the open. It was half an hour or so before they could consider themselves at all clear of the ice; and even then they had no idea of the distance from the ship, for the *Sheriff Ivory* herself could nowhere be sighted.

For hours they rowed on helplessly over the trackless waves; it was dark before they sighted the missing ship in front of them. By the time they had reached it, Arnold Willoughby, now faint and half unconscious with cold and exposure, hardly realized as yet the full extent of his injuries.

But when next morning he woke again in his bunk after a night of semi-unconsciousness, he discovered that his arm was really broken, and, worse still, that his right hand was so crushed and maimed as to be almost useless.

The voyage back to Dundee was for Arnold a terrible one. He lay most of the time in his hammock, for he was now useless as a 'hand'; and his arm, clumsily set by the mate and the bo'sun, gave

him a great deal of trouble in the small hours of the morning. Moreover, his outlook for the future was exceedingly doubtful. It was clear he would never again be fit to go to sea; while the damage to his hand, which he feared was irrevocable, would make it impossible for him to return to the trade of painter. Whither to turn for a living when he reached home again, he knew not. Nay, even the desire to see Kathleen again, which had come over him so fiercely when he sat under the shadow of the impending iceberg, grew much feebler and fainter now that he felt how impossible it would be for him in future ever to provide for her livelihood. More than at any previous time the self-deposed Earl began to realize to himself what a failure he had proved on equal terms with his fellow-man in the struggle for existence.

Yet even if you are a failure, it is something to accept your position bravely; and Arnold Willoughby always accepted his own like a man with that cheery pessimism which is almost characteristic of his caste in England.

CHAPTER XXIII.

A LITERARY DÉBUT.

After that serious accident, Arnold Willoughby lay ill in his bunk for several days before he felt fit for anything. Meanwhile, as is the wont of sailor folk on such hard voyages, he was left entirely to himself, or scantily tended at moments of leisure by his rough companions. At last, one day, more to still the throbs of pain in his shattered right hand than any-

thing else, he asked for the manuscript of his Venetian cipher.

'Oh, that?' his messmate saw as soon as Arnold had clearly explained just what it was he wanted. 'That bundle o' yaller papers! I threw them out one day. A pack o' rubbish! I thought 'twan't nothing.'

'What? Threw it ove board?' Arnold exclaimed, taken aback and horrified at such vandalism.

The messmate nodded.

'Yes, th' old yaller un,' he answered. 'Them loose sheets, all torn an' stained, if that's what you mean. They wan't up to much. I didn't set no store by 'em.'

'And the note-books?' Arnold asked, with that little tremor of fear which comes over one when one fancies the work of months may have been destroyed or rendered useless by some casual piece of unthinking carelessness.

'Oh, the note-books? No, not them; they're safe enough in yonder,' the sailor answered, nodding backward toward the locker by the bunk. 'I thought they was more like, and I didn't chuck 'em.'

'Get them out,' Arnold cried nervously. 'Let me see them. I want them.' It occurred to him that in his present necessity he might be able to make something out of his painstaking translation, even if the original manuscript itself had really perished.

The sailor brought them out. Arnold glanced through them rapidly. Yes, yes; they were all there, quite safe; and as the drowning man clings to the proverbial straw, so Arnold Willoughby in his need clung to that precious manuscript. He laid it carefully under his pillow when he slept, and he spent a

large part of his waking time in polishing and improving the diction of his translation.

When at last they returned to Dundee, Arnold found he had to go into hospital for a fortnight. No sooner was he out again, however, than he made up his mind, maimed hand and all, to go up to London and look out for Kathleen Hesslegrave. The impression printed upon his brain by that episode of the icebergs persisted with double force now he was fairly ashore again. Should he not give his one love at least the chance of proving herself a truer woman than he had ever thought her?

He went up to London by sea, to save expense. As soon as he landed, he took a room in a small lodging-house in the seafaring quarter. Then he set to work at once to hunt up the London Directory so as to discover if he could where the Hesslegraves were living.

He knew nothing, of course, of Mrs. Hesslegrave's death; but he saw by the Directory that she was no longer ensconced in the old rooms at Kensington. The only Hesslegrave now known to the big red volume, in fact, was Mr. Reginald Hesslegrave, of Capel Court, City, set down, with half a dozen other assorted names, for a flat in a small lodging-house in the abyss of Brompton.

Now, Arnold remembered quite well that Kathleen's brother was named Reginald; so to the unfashionable lodging-house in the abyss of Brompton he directed his steps accordingly.

'Is Mrs. Hesslegrave living here?' he asked the slipshod maid who opened the door to him.

The slipshod maid mumbled 'Yes,' in an inarticulate voice, holding the door in her hand at the same time, after the fashion of her kind, as if to bar his

entrance; but Arnold slipped past her sideways by a strategic movement; and the slipshod maid, accepting accomplished facts, showed him up, with a very bad grace, to the rooms on the first floor which Reggie had occupied before his marriage, and which he was now compelled by hard decree of fate to share with Florrie.

The slipshod maid pushed open the door, and with the muttered words, 'Genelman to see you, mum—Mr. Wil'by,' disappeared downstairs again with shuffling rapidity.

But the moment Arnold found himself face to face with the vision of beauty in the fluffy black hair, cut short all over, and frizzed like a Papuan's, he saw at once this couldn't be *his* Mrs. Hesslegrave. 'I beg your pardon,' he said, hesitating. 'I think there must be some mistake. I wanted to see Mrs. Hesslegrave.'

'I *am* Mrs. Hesslegrave,' Florrie answered with dignity. Five foot two can be dignified when it makes its mind up to it.

Arnold started a little.

'Then I suppose you must be Mr. Reginald Hesslegrave's wife,' he exclaimed, taken aback. 'I didn't know he was married.'

'He's not been married very long,' Florrie admitted with her pretty coquettish smile, which recent misfortunes had not entirely clouded. 'Did you want to see Reggie? He's just now come in, and he'll be down in a minute.'

Arnold took a seat and waited; but he couldn't resist the temptation to ask at once, meanwhile, the latest tidings of Kathleen. Florrie had by this time acquired from her husband a considerable dislike of that hard-hearted woman, who wouldn't marry a rich man—such an easy thing to do—on purpose because

she didn't want to be of use to dear Reggie. So her answers were of a sort which made Arnold suspect she didn't particularly care for her newly-acquired sister-in-law. By the time Reggie came down, indeed, she had made her position tolerably plain to Arnold, and had also managed, with innate feminine astuteness, to arrive at the conclusion that this was the Other Man whom Kathleen had known a couple of years ago at Venice. Nay, so convinced was she of this fact, that she made some little excuse to leave Arnold alone in the room for a minute while she ran upstairs to communicate her suspicions on the point to Reggie. This vile interloper, the other man, must be promptly crushed in the interests of the family. When Reggie himself at last descended, he fully shared Florrie's view; the very eagerness with which the stranger asked after Kitty's health showed Reggie at once he had very good reasons for wishing to see her.

Now, Reggie, though a silly young man, was by no means a fool where his own interests were concerned; on the contrary, he was well endowed with that intuitive cunning which enables a man to find out at once whatever is most to his personal advantage. So, having arrived instinctively at the conclusion that this was the other fellow of whom his sister had spoken, he proceeded, as he phrased it himself, 'to put a spoke in the other fellow's wheel' on the subject of Kathleen.

'Oh no, my sister's not in town,' he said with a slight smile, and a quick side-glance at Florrie, as a warning that she was not on any account to contradict this flagrant departure from historical accuracy; 'she's gone down into the country—to Cromer, in fact,' Reggie continued, growing bolder in the details

of his romance as he eyed Arnold Willoughby. 'She's going to stay there with some friends of ours, to meet another old Venetian acquaintance whom I dare say you knew—a charming young American, Mr. Rufus Mortimer.'

Reggie delivered this home-thrust direct, watching his visitor's face as he did so to see whether it roused any appreciable emotion; and he was not disappointed with the result of his clever move. It was 'Check!' most decidedly.

Arnold Willoughby gave a sudden start.

'Rufus Mortimer!' he exclaimed. 'She's going down to Cromer to stop with some friends in the same house with Rufus Mortimer?'

'Yes,' Reggie answered carelessly. Then he smiled to himself a curious and very significant smile. 'The fact is,' he went on boldly, determined to make that spoke in the other fellow's wheel a good big round one while he was about it, 'they're very thick together just now, our Kitty and the American. Between ourselves, as you're a friend of the family's, and knew the dear old mater, I don't mind telling you—I rather expect to reckon Rufus Mortimer as my brother-in-law elect before many weeks are over.' And this last remark, so far as Mr. Reginald's own expectations were concerned, could not be condemned as wholly untruthful.

'Are they engaged, then?' Arnold asked, quivering. His worst fears were confirmed. Failing the Earl in disguise, Kathleen had flung herself into the arms of the American millionaire, as next best among her chances.

'Well, not exactly engaged, don't you know,' Reggie responded airily. 'Not quite what you can call

engaged, perhaps. But it's an understood thing all the same in the family.'

Arnold Willoughby's heart sank like lead. He didn't know why, but somehow, ever since that afternoon in the ice-channel, he had cherished, day and night, a sort of irrational, instinctive belief that, after all, he was mistaken, and that Kathleen loved him. Yet now he saw once more he was in error on that point; she was really nothing more than the self-seeking, money-loving, position-hunting girl her own mother had so frankly represented her to be that fateful day in the rooms by the Piazza.

Poor Kathleen! She was indeed unfortunate in her relations. At Venice it was Mrs. Hesslegrave, in London it was Reggie, who so cruelly misrepresented her to her much misled lover.

Arnold didn't stop long. Nor did he ask for Kathleen's address. After all, if she was really going to marry Rufus Mortimer, it would be a pity for him to intrude at such a moment on her happiness. Mortimer was rich, and would make her comfortable. Money was what she wanted, and if Kathleen wanted it—— .

Even as he thought that hard thought, he broke off in his own mind suddenly. No, no; it wasn't money she wanted, his beautiful, innocent Kathleen; of that he felt certain. And yet, if she really meant to marry Rufus Mortimer, it was at least his duty not to step in now between the prospective bride and her rich new lover, who could do so much more for her than ever he himself could do.

As soon as he was gone, Master Reggie turned philosophically to Florrie, and observed with a smile:

'I settled *his* hash, I flatter myself. *He* won't bother her any more. I've sent him about his business. And a precious good thing for herself too, if it comes to that: for just fancy a girl like Kitty being tied for life to a fellow in sailor clothes, and badly cut at that, with no right hand to brag about!'

But as for Arnold, he took his way sadly down the crowded streets, with the last remnants of a heart well-nigh crushed out of him.

However, as long as a man lives, he has to think about his living. Bread and cheese we must have, though our hearts be breaking. Next day, accordingly, Arnold called at a well-known firm of publishers in the City, Stanley and Lockhart by name, to ask whether any decision had yet been arrived at about the manuscript translation from an Italian original he had sent them by post from Dundee a fortnight earlier.

The senior partner, an acute-looking man, with very little hair on his head to boast of, gazed hard at his visitor.

'Well, yes, Mr. Willoughby,' he said, with a dry business smile. 'I've looked at your manuscript, and our reader has reported on it; and I'm free to tell you we think very well of it. It's one of the most brilliant bits of historical fiction we've had submitted to us for a long time.'

'Oh, I beg your pardon,' Arnold interposed, colouring slightly. 'I think you're labouring under a misapprehension. Have you read the Introduction? I there explain that it's translated from an Italian manuscript.'

'Yes, yes,' Mr. Stanley broke in, smiling still more broadly. 'I know all that, of course. It's admirable,

admirable. Nothing could be better done. Falls in exactly with the current taste for high-spiced and strongly-flavoured historical romance, with a good dash of bloodshed; and the Introduction itself is one of the best parts—so circumstantial and solemn, and with such an innocent air of truth and sincerity.'

'But it *is* true, you know,' Arnold cried, annoyed at being doubted, which was the one thing a man of his sensitive honour could never put up with. 'I found the manuscript at Venice, in a tiny little shop, exactly under the circumstances I there describe; and I translated it into English during my spare time on board ships in two Northern voyages.'

'In-deed!' the publisher replied, with a quiet, self-restrained smile. He was accustomed to dealing with these imaginative authors, some of whom it is whispered, do not entirely confine their faculty of fiction to mere literary products. 'And where is the manuscript now? It would be an interesting document.'

'Unfortunately, it's lost,' Arnold Willoughby answered, growing hot. 'One of my fellow-sailors took it out of my locker while I was confined to my bunk with this injured hand of mine, and destroyed it or threw it overboard. At any rate, it's not forthcoming. And I'm sorry for that, as it's of historical importance, and, of course, it would be useful in proving the authenticity and value of the narrative.'

'*Very* useful indeed,' Mr. Stanley replied, with a meaning smile, which again annoyed Arnold. 'However, the question now is not as to the authenticity or authorship of the narrative at all, but as to its money's

worth for purposes of publication. We will agree that it is essentially a work of fiction. Whether it was written by you, or by Master John Collingham, of Holt, in Norfolk, it's still a work of fiction. He may have designed it to amuse or to deceive the Council of Ten; but, any way, I tell you, he was a first-rate novelist. I deal in these things, and I flatter myself I know a work of art when I see it. Well, now, then, let's get to business, Mr. Willoughby. What I should propose to do, is to buy the copyright outright from you. And as this is a doubtful venture by a new author, suppose we make you an offer of fifty pounds for the manuscript.'

Arnold's heart gave a wild leap. Fifty pounds! Why, as things now went, 'twas a perfect Pactolus! On fifty pounds he could subsist for a twelvemonth. Since he ceased to be Earl of Axminster, he had never for a moment had so large a sum at one time in his possession.

He didn't know he was making a bad bargain; and, indeed, so doubtful did his poor little venture seem to himself, that even if someone else of greater experience had stood by his side to warn him against selling a piece of property of unknown value outright like that for the first sum offered, he would probably have answered, and perhaps answered rightly:

'I'd rather take fifty pounds down, and be certain of my money, than speculate on what may, perhaps, be a bad investment.'

Fifty pounds down is a big sum to a beginner; and the beginner would most often be justified in jumping at it.

At any rate, Arnold jumped at it. His face flushed with pleasure.

'I should be delighted,' he said, 'to accept such an offer. And the book would come out?'

'At the beginning of the new season. Very well, then, that's settled.'

Mr. Stanley took up a blank form of agreement lying careless by his side, and filling it in rapidly with name, date, and title, as well as valuable consideration, handed it across forthwith for inspection to Arnold.

'Is that right?' he asked, with a wave of his pen.

'Quite right,' Arnold answered, 'except that, of course, you mustn't say "written by me." It ought to be "deciphered and translated by me." I can't sell you as mine what I've never written.'

The publisher gave a short sniff of suppressed impatience, but drew his pen half angrily through the peccant words.

'There. Will that satisfy you?' he asked.

And Arnold, glancing at it, took up the proffered pen and signed his name at the bottom.

Mr. Stanley drew a cheque and handed it over to him.

Arnold scanned it and handed it back.

'I'm afraid this won't do,' he said. 'It's crossed, I see, and I happen to have no banking account. Could you ki dly give me one drawn simply to bearer?'

'No banking account?' the publisher cried.

This was certainly the very queerest sort of literary man he had ever yet come across.

'No,' Arnold answered stoutly. 'You must remember I'm nothing but a common sailor.'

The man of business drew a second cheque, tearing up the first as soon as he had done so.

'But where did you learn Italian?' he asked; 'and

how did you pick up all this intimate knowledge of Elizabethan England, and Spain, and Italy?'

'You forget that was all in the manuscript,' Arnold answered simply.

The publisher waved his hand again. 'Twas an impatient wave. There was really no dealing with a fellow like this, who told a lie and stuck to it.

'Ah, true,' he mused reflectively, with the same curious smile. 'Well, Mr. Willoughby, I should say you have a great future in fiction before you.'

Arnold hardly knew whether to accept that remark as a compliment or otherwise.

But as he descended the publisher's stairs that morning, he had got rid of the copyright and all property and interest in a work entitled 'An Elizabethan Seadog,' to Messrs. Stanley and Lockhart, their heirs and executors, in consideration of the sum of fifty pounds sterling.

And Mr. Stanley was saying to Mr. Lockhart in the privacy of the counting-house:

'I'll tell you what it is, Lockhart, I believe we've got hold of a second Rider Haggard. I never read anything more interesting in my life than this sailor-fellow's narrative. It has an air of history about it that's positively astonishing. Heaven knows where he learned to write such English as that! but he writes it admirably.'

CHAPTER XXIV.

AN ANGEL FROM THE WEST.

Rufus Mortimer lay stretched at full length on the heather-clad dome of a Surrey hill-top. He was turn-

ing lazily over the pages of a weekly paper. He passed from the politics to the social 'middles,' and from the middles again to the reviews and the literary column. It was dull, deadly dull, the self-laudatory *communiqués* of second-rate amateurs. His eye ran carelessly through the items of news and the hints of forthcoming works: 'We understand that the article on "Richelieu and his Contemporaries" in the current number of the *South British Quarterly*, which is attracting so much attention in well-informed circles at the present moment, is from the facile yet learned pen of Mr. J. Anstruther Maclaren, the well-known authority on the age of the Bourbons.'—'Mrs. Rotherham's new novel, "My Heart and His," will shortly be published by Messrs. Rigby, Short, and Co. It will deal with the vicissitudes of an Italian gipsy girl, who studies medicine at Girton, and afterwards becomes convinced of the truths of Theosophy, the principles of which are eloquently defended at some length by the accomplished authoress.'—'Mr. Edmund Wilkes, Q.C., denies the report that he is the author of that clever Society sketch, "An Archbishop's Daughter-in-law," which has caused so much amusement, and so many searchings of heart in high ecclesiastical and legal quarters during the present season. We are also assured there is no good ground for attributing the work to the wife of the veteran Dean of Northborough, whose finished literary handicraft does not in any way resemble the crude and unformed style of that now famous story. The work bears, on the contrary, internal traces of being due to the sprightly wit of a very young lady, acquainted with the clerical society of a northern cathedral town, but little at home in the great world of London.'—*Rufus*

Mortimer almost laid down the paper in disgust. Better, surely, the fellowship of the eternal hills, the myriad buzz of the bees, the purple heather, than the solicitous echoes of this provincial gossip.

But just as he was going to fling the journal down in his distaste, his eye chanced to light upon a single belated paragraph, wedged in between two others near the end of the column: 'Messrs. Stanley and Lockhart will publish almost immediately a new and stirring romance of the Armada period, entitled, "An Elizabethan Sea-dog," purporting to be written by one John Collingham, a Norfolk sailor, who was imprisoned in Spain by the Inquisition for refusing to abjure "the damnable doctrine of her Grace's supremacy." It is announced as "translated and edited by Arnold Willoughby," and is described in their circular as being one of the most thrilling works of adventure published since the beginning of the present revived taste for the literature of romantic exploits.'

In a moment Rufus Mortimer had jumped up from his seat on the overblown heather. In accordance with his promise to Kathleen, he had been hunting for weeks to find Arnold Willoughby; and now, by pure chance, he had lighted unawares on a singular clue to his rival's whereabouts.

Rufus Mortimer was a man of his word. Moreover, like all the higher natures, he was raised far above the petty meanness of jealousy. If he loved Kathleen, he could not help desiring to do whatever would please her, even though it were that hard task—to find for her sake the lover who was to supplant him. As soon as he read those words, he had but one thought in his mind—he must go up to town at once and see whether

Stanley and Lockhart could supply him with the address of their new author.

In five minutes more he was back at his lodgings, whither he had come down, partly for rest and change after his fresh disappointment, partly to paint a little purple gem of English moorland landscape for an American Exhibition. He turned to his Bradshaw eagerly. An up-train would be due in twenty minutes. It was sharp work to catch it, for his rooms on the hill-top lay more than a mile from the station; but off he set at a run, so eager was he to find out the truth about Arnold Willoughby. At the station he had just time to despatch a hasty telegram up to town to Kathleen—'Am on the track of the missing man. Will wire again to-night. Have good hopes of finding him.—RUFUS MORTIMER'—when the train steamed in, and he jumped impetuously into a first-class carriage.

At Waterloo he hailed a hansom, and drove straight to Stanley and Lockhart's. He sent up his card, and asked if he might see one of the partners. The American millionaire's name was well enough known in London to secure him at once a favourable reception. Mr. Stanley received him with the respect justly due to so many hard dollars. He came provided with the universal passport. Rufus Mortimer went straight to the business in hand. Could Mr. Stanley inform him of the present address of Mr. Arnold Willoughby, the editor of this new book, 'An Elizabethan Sea-dog?'

Mr. Stanley hesitated.

'Are you a friend of Mr. Willoughby's?' he asked, looking out over his spectacles. 'For you know he poses as a sort of dark horse. He's reticent about himself, and we don't even know whether Arnold

Willoughby's his real name or a pseudonym. He dresses like and pretends to be a common sailor.'

'Oh yes,' Mortimer answered, smiling. 'Willoughby's his own name, right enough; and he is what he seems to be, an able-bodied mariner. But he's a very remarkable man in his way, for all that—a painter, a reader, extremely well informed, and in every sense a gentleman. There are no flies on Willoughby.'

'No what?' Mr. Stanley asked, opening his eyes.

'No flies,' Rufus answered, with a compassionate smile for English dulness. 'I mean, he's fresh, and clever, and original.'

'So we gathered,' the head of the firm replied. 'Well, to anybody but you, Mr. Mortimer, we would refuse the address; but I suppose we may take it for granted in your case you want it for none but purposes which Mr. Willoughby himself would approve of.'

And he smiled, all benignity.

'I hope so,' Rufus answered good-humouredly. 'I want it, first, for myself; and, secondly, for a person in whom I may venture to say Mr. Willoughby is deeply interested.'

The publisher raised his eyebrows. That was the very worst plea Rufus Mortimer could have put in; for when a man's clearly skulking from the eyes of the world, the person (presumably a lady) who is most deeply interested in him is, oftener than not, the one creature on earth he's most anxious to hide from. So the wise man hesitated.

'Well, I don't know whether I ought to tell you,' he said at last, shading his eyes with his hand, 'but to be quite, quite frank with you, we don't exactly

know whether we've got his real address or not ourselves. He has his proofs posted to him at a small seafaring coffee-house, somewhere right away down in the far East End; and that's hardly the sort of place where a man of letters, such as he evidently is, would be likely to be lodging.'

Rufus Mortimer smiled once more.

'I expect it's where he lodges,' he answered. 'At Venice he used to board in the house of a sort of inferior marine-stores dealer. He's a live man, is Willoughby; he doesn't trouble himself much about the upholsteries and the fripperies.'

The publisher, still half unconvinced, wrote down the address on a slip of paper; and Mortimer, just thanking him for it, rushed off to another cab, and hurried away at full speed to the East End coffee-house.

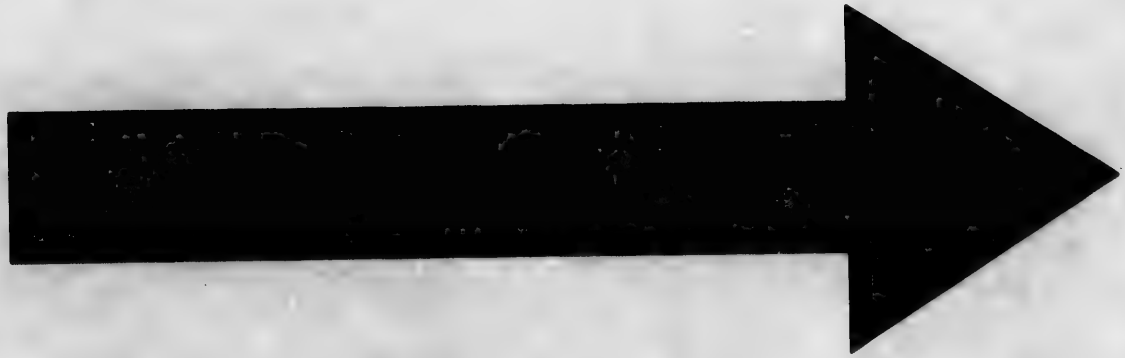
Fortunately, Arnold Willoughby was in. He had little to go out for. Mortimer went up to his room, a plain, small bedroom on the second floor, very simply furnished, but clean and comfortable. He was taken aback at the first look of the man.

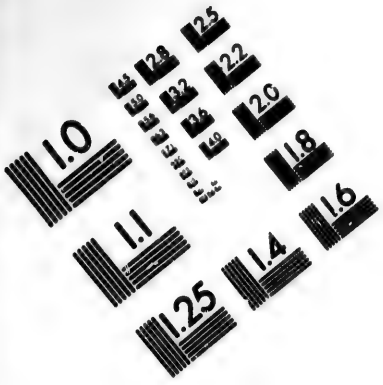
Arnold seemed thinner than at Venice, very worn and ill-looking. But he started up at the sound of Mortimer's cheery voice, which he recognised at once with its scarcely perceptible tinge of pleasant and cultivated Pennsylvanian accent. Then he held out his left hand.

Mortimer saw for himself that the right hung half idle by his side, as if paralyzed.

'Why, what does this mean?' he asked quickly.

Arnold smiled in reply, and grasped his friend's hand warmly; though, to say the truth, he felt not quite at his ease with the man who was to marry





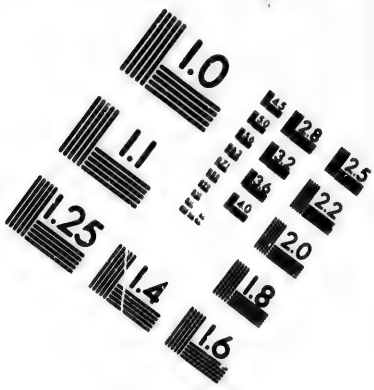
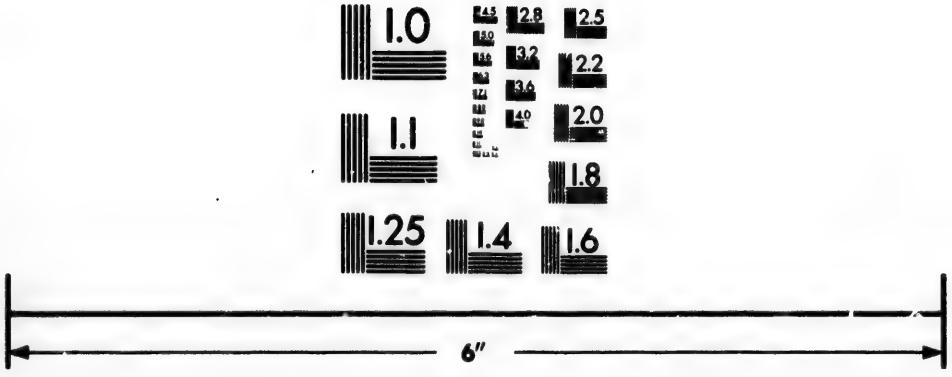


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Kathleen Hesslegrave. He would have been glad in some ways to be spared this visit: though, now it was thrust upon him, he was really thankful in others that he was to know the truth, and to put himself once more *en rapport* with Kathleen.

'Oh, nothing much,' he answered, forcing a difficult smile. 'I got crushed in an iceberg accident. Worse calamities happen at sea. Though it's maimed my painting hand, which is always a misfortune.'

'Is it serious?' Mortimer asked with interest.

'Well, the doctors tell me it'll never be good for anything much again,' Arnold answered bravely. 'I can learn to write with my left, of course; but I must give up painting, I'm afraid, altogether.'

They sat and talked for some time about the accident and how it had happened; but neither of them said a word for many minutes together of the subject that was nearest both their hearts that moment. Arnold was too shy and reserved; while as for Rufus Mortimer, he felt, under the circumstances, he had no right to betray Kathleen Hesslegrave's confidence.

At last, however, Arnold mustered up courage to make the doubtful plunge.

'I believe I have to congratulate you,' he said, with a rather feeble smile, looking hard at Mortimer.

The American winced.

'To congratulate me?' he answered. 'I don't quite understand. On what, and why, please?'

Arnold gazed at him, and hesitated. Ought he to go on or hold his peace? It would be more discreet, perhaps even more honourable, to say nothing further, but, having once begun, he *must* get to the bottom of it.

'Well, about Miss Hesslegrave,' he replied. 'I heard—that is to say—I understood you were going to be married to her. And I'm sure I don't know any man in the world more altogether worthy of her.'

Rufus Mortimer stared at him.

'Married to her!' he exclaimed. 'Why, who on earth told you that? My dear fellow, you're mistaken. I'm sorry to say there isn't one word of truth in it.'

'But her own brother told me so,' Arnold persisted, unable to disentangle this ravelled skein.

'Her own brother!' Mortimer exclaimed. 'What! that wretched little monkey? He told you this lie? Why, whenever did you see him?'

'About six or eight weeks ago,' Arnold answered, growing hot; 'up here in London. And he certainly gave me to understand it was a foregone conclusion.'

'What! he saw you six or eight weeks ago, and he never told Miss Hesslegrave?' Mortimer cried, justly angry, and forgetting, in his surprise, all about Kathleen's secret. 'I see what he did that for. The selfish little wretch! How mean! How disgraceful of him!'

'*Why* should he tell Miss Hesslegrave?' Arnold answered, looking hard at him. 'Surely, under the circumstances, it would be best she should see and hear nothing more of me.'

Rufus Mortimer hesitated. He loved Kathleen too well not to desire to serve her; and he felt sure Arnold was labouring under some profound delusion. But he made up his mind that, under the circumstances, it was best to be frank.

'You're mistaken,' he replied. 'Miss Hesslegrave is anxious to see you again, in order to clear up a most serious misapprehension. To tell you the plain truth, Willoughby, that's why I'm here to-day. I don't know what the misapprehension itself may be,' he added hastily, for he saw from a faint shade which flitted on Arnold's face that that quick and sensitive nature had again jumped at a conclusion adverse to Kathleen. 'She hasn't betrayed your confidence, whatever it may be; and if I'm betraying hers now, it's only because I see there's no other way out of it.' He paused a moment and wiped his brow; then the real man came out in one of those rare bursts of unadulterated nature which men seldom permit themselves. 'You don't know what it costs me,' he said earnestly. 'You don't know what it costs me.'

He spoke with such transparent sincerity and depth of feeling that Arnold couldn't help sympathizing with him. And yet, even so, after all his bitter experience, he couldn't help letting the thought flit through his mind all the same—was Kathleen still trying to catch the Earl, but keeping a second string to her bow, all the while, in the rich American?

He laid his hand gently on Rufus Mortimer's shoulder.

'My dear fellow,' he said with real feeling, 'I can see how much it means to you. I'm sorry indeed if I stand between you and her. I never wished to do so. There has indeed been an error, a very serious error; but it has been on *her* part, not on mine. She would have married me once, I know, but under a misapprehension. If she knew the whole truth now, she wouldn't want to see me again. And even if she did,' he added, holding up his maimed hand pathetically—

'even if it was the painter she wanted, and not—ah, no! I forgot—but even if it was the painter, how could she take him now, and how could he burden her with himself, in this mangled condition? It was always a wild dream; by now it's an impossible one.'

'That's for *her* to judge, Willoughby,' Rufus Mortimer answered, with earnestness. 'Ah, man, how can you talk so? To think you might make her yours with a turn of your hand, and won't—while I!—oh, I'd give every penny I possess if only I dare hope for her. And here I am, pleading with you on her behalf against myself: and not even knowing whether I'm not derogating from her dignity and honour by condescending on her behalf to say so much as I do to you.'

He leaned back in his easy-chair and held his hand to his forehead. For a moment neither spoke. Then Arnold began slowly:

'I love her very much, Mortimer,' he said. 'Once, I loved her distractedly. I don't think I could speak about her to any other man; certainly not to any Englishman. But you Americans are somehow quite different from us in fibre. I can say things to you I couldn't possibly say to any fellow-countryman. Now, this is what I feel: she could be happy with you. I can do nothing for her now. I must just live out my own life the best way I can with what limbs remain to me. It would be useless my seeing her. It would only mean a painful explanation; and, when it was over, we must go our own ways—and in the end she would marry you.'

'I think you owe her that explanation, though,' Mortimer answered slowly. 'Mind, I'm pleading her

cause with you against myself—because I promised her to do all I could to find you; and I interpret that promise according to the spirit and not according to the letter. But you owe it to her to see her. You think the misunderstanding was on her side alone; she thinks it was on yours. Very well, then; that shows there is still something to be cleared up. You must see her and clear it. For even if she didn't marry you, she wouldn't marry me. So it's no use urging that. As to your hand—no, Willoughby, you *must* let me say it—if you can't support her yourself, what are a few thousands to me? *You* needn't accept them; I could make them over to her, before her marriage. I know that's not the way things are usually done; but you and I and she are not usual people. Why shouldn't we cast overboard conventions for once, and act like three rational human beings?'

Arnold Willoughby grasped his hand. He couldn't speak for a minute. Something rose in his throat and choked him. Here at least was one man whom he could trust—one man to whom earl or sailor made no difference. He was almost tempted in the heat of the moment to confess and explain everything.

'Mortimer,' he said at last, holding his friend's hand in his, 'you have always been kindness itself to me. I will answer you one thing: if I could accept that offer from any man, I could accept it from you. But I couldn't, I couldn't. For the sake of my own independence, I once gave up everything; how could I go back upon it now in order to——'

But before he could finish his sentence, Rufus Mortimer stared at him in one of those strange flashes of intuition which come over women often, and men sometimes, at critical moments of profound emotion.

'Then you *are* Lord Axminster!' he cried.

'Did she tell you so?' Arnold burst out, drawing his hand away suddenly.

'No, never. Not a word, not a breath, not a hint of it,' Mortimer answered firmly. 'She kept your secret well—as I will keep it. I see it all now. It comes home to me in a moment. You thought it was the Earl she had fallen in love with, not the sailor and painter. You thought she would only care for you if you assumed your title. My dear Willoughby, you're mistaken, if ever a man was.' He drew a letter-case from his pocket. 'Read that,' he said earnestly. 'The circumstances justify me in breaking her confidence so far. I do it for her own sake. Heaven knows it costs me dear enough to do it.'

Arnold Willoughby, deeply stirred, read it through in profound silence. It was the letter Kathleen had written in answer to Rufus Mortimer's last proposal. He read it through, every line, with the intensest emotion. It was a good woman's letter if ever he had seen one. It stung him like remorse.

'If I had never met *him*, I might perhaps have loved you dearly. But I have loved one man too well in my time ever to love a second; and whether I find him again or not, my mind is quite made up: I cannot give myself to any other. I speak to you frankly, because from the very first you have known my secret, and because I can trust and respect and like you. But if ever I meet him again, I shall be his, and his only; and his only I must be if I never again meet him.'

Arnold Willoughby handed the letter back to Mortimer with tears in his eyes. He felt he had wronged her. Whether she knew he was an Earl

from the beginning or not, he believed now she really loved him for his own sake alone, and could never love any other man. She was not mercenary; if she were, she would surely have accepted so brilliant an offer as Rufus Mortimer's. She was not fickle; if she were, she would never have written such a letter as that about a man who had apparently disappeared from her horizon. Arnold's heart was touched home.

'I must go to her,' he said instantly. 'I must see her, and set this right. Where is she now, Mortimer?'

'I'll go with you,' Mortimer answered quickly.—'No; don't be afraid,' he added with a bitter smile. 'As far as the door, I mean. Don't suppose I want to hamper you in such an interview.'

For it occurred to him that if they went together to the door in a cab, he might be allowed to pay for it, and that otherwise Arnold wouldn't be able to afford one. But Kathleen's heart must not be kept on that stretch for ten minutes longer than was absolutely necessary.

CHAPTER XXV.

THE MEETING.

Arnold Willoughby arrived at K...leen Hesslegrave's door in a tremor of delight, excitement, and ecstasy. During all those long months that he had been parted from her, he had loved her with his whole soul—loved the memory of the girl he had once believed her, even though that girl, as he fancied, never really existed. And now that her letter to

Rufus Mortimer had once more reinstated her image in his mind as he first imagined her, his love came back to him with a rush, even more vividly than ever.

For had he not now, in her own very handwriting, the assurance that she loved him—the assurance that she was his, be he present or absent? He could approach her at last without any doubts on that subject. He could be sure of her answering love, her real affection for himself, whatever might be the explanation of those strange expressions Mrs. Hesslegrave had attributed to her that afternoon in Venice.

He mounted the stairs in a fever of joy and suppressed expectation. Kathleen sat in her little drawing-room, waiting anxiously for the promised second telegram from Rufus Mortimer. A knock at the outer portal of the flat aroused her, all tremulous. Could that be the telegraph-boy? She held her room door half ajar, and listened for the voice.

When it came, it sent a thrill of surprise, delight, and terror down her spine like a cold wave. 'Is Miss Hesslegrave in?' it said; but the tone—the tone was surely Arnold Willoughby's!

'Miss Hesslegrave is engaged this afternoon, sir, and can't see anybody,' the maid answered demurely. For Kathleen felt too agitated, with hope and suspense, for receiving visitors.

'I think she'll see *me*,' Arnold replied with a confident smile; and while the girl still hesitated, Kathleen's own voice broke out from within in very clear tones:

'Let the gentleman come in, Mary.'

At sound of her voice, a strange thrill passed through Arnold Willoughby in turn; he rushed along the passage and burst into the sitting-room. There stood Kathleen, pale and panting, with one hand on a

chair, and one on her throbbing heart—much thinner and whiter than he had known her of old—much thinner and whiter, but not one whit less beautiful. In that first tumult of wild delight at his love restored, Arnold Willoughby darted forward, and for the first time in his life would have clasped her in his arms and kissed her as she stood there.

But Kathleen, looking hard at him, and recognising in a second how ill and wasted he was, with his maimed arm hanging loose by his side in its helplessness, yet waved him back from her at once with an imperious gesture.

'No, no,' she said proudly, conquering her love with an effort. 'Not now, not now, Arnold! Once I would have let you, if you wished; and still even to-day—oh, my heart, my poor heart—I could willingly let you—if it were not for that barrier. But the barrier is there even now; and until you understand everything—until you know I was never what you have thought me so long—I can't possibly allow you. I don't want you to trust me; I don't want you to believe me; I want you to know—to know and understand; I want you *to see* for yourself how you have wronged me.'

Arnold's face was all penitence. As she spoke, so fearlessly and so proudly, yet with such an undercurrent of tenderness, he wondered to himself how he could ever have doubted her.

'Oh, Kathleen,' he cried, standing back a pace, and stretching out his hands, and calling her for the first time to her face by the name she had always borne in his thoughts and his day-dreams, 'don't say that to me, please. Don't crush me so utterly. I know how wrong I have been; I know how much I

have misjudged you. But don't visit it too heavily upon me. I have suffered for it myself; see, see how I have suffered for it!—and you don't know yet how difficult it was for me to resist the conclusion. After what I was told, my darling, my heart's love, I could hardly think otherwise.'

'I know that,' Kathleen answered, standing opposite him and trembling, with a fierce desire to throw herself at once into her lover's arms, only just restrained by a due sense of her womanly dignity. 'If I didn't know it, Mr. Willoughby—or Arnold, if you will—I wouldn't allow you to come here; I wouldn't allow you to speak to me. I would guard my pride better. It's *because* I know it that I'm going to explain all now to you. It's because I know it that I'm going to lay my heart bare, like an open book in front of you. Before I hear anything else—before I even ask what *that* means'—and she glanced at his useless hand with unspoken distress—'we must clear up this mystery. Till the misunderstanding's cleared, we can't talk about anything else as we ought to one another. And in order to clear it up, I shall tell you—just everything. I shall open my whole soul. I shall tear my heart out for you. There's no room for reserve between us two to-day. We must understand one another, once for all, oh Arnold, my Arnold, now I've found you, I've found you!'

Arnold gazed at her, and melted with shame and remorse. Her passion overcame him. How could he ever for one moment have doubted that pure, that queenly soul? But then—Mrs. Hesslegrave's words! that dark saying about the earldom! those strange mysterious hints of a deliberate conspiracy!

'You thought I knew from the first who you were?'

Kathleen began, drawing breath and facing him boldly.

'I thought you believed from the first I was Lord Axminster,' Arnold answered, quite frankly, but still refusing to commit himself; 'and I thought it was through that belief alone that you first permitted a common sailor to win his way as far as he did, if he did, into your affections. But, Kathleen, I won't think so now; if you tell me you didn't, I'll believe you at once; and if you tell me you did, but that you loved me for myself, though you took me for ten thousand times over an Earl, oh, Kathleen, I will believe you; I will believe you and love you, with all my heart and soul, if only you'll allow me.'

It was a great deal for Arnold Willoughby, with his past behind him, to say; but it wasn't enough for Kathleen. She was still unsatisfied. She stood before him, trembling and quivering all over with love, yet just waving him back with one imperious hand when he strove to draw nearer to her.

'No, no,' she answered, holding him off with her queenly gesture. 'That's not what I want. I want plainly to clear myself. I want you to know, to be sure and certain, beyond the shadow of a doubt, I was not what you took me for. I want you to understand the whole real truth. I want you to see for yourself what I thought of you first; I want you to see when I began to love you—for I *did* love you, Arnold, and I *do* love you still—and how and when I first discovered your real name and personality.' She moved across the room from where she stood to a desk in the corner. 'Read this,' she said simply, taking out a diary and handing it to him. 'Begin there, on the day I first met you in London. Then

turn on to these pages where I put this mark, and read straight through till you come to the end—when you went away from Venice. The end of everything for me—till you came again this evening.'

It was no time for protestations. Arnold saw she was in earnest. He took the book and read. Meanwhile, Kathleen sank into an easy-chair opposite, and watched his face eagerly as he turned over the pages.

He read on and on in a fever of delight. He read how she had come upon him in Venice in Mortimer's gondola. He read how she had begun to like him, in spite of doubts and hesitations: how she had wondered whether a lady ought to let herself grow so fond of a man so far beneath her in rank and station: how she had stifled her doubts by saying to herself he had genius and refinement and a poet's nature; he was a gentleman, after all, a true gentleman at heart, a gentleman of the truest in feelings and manners. Then he saw how the evidences of her liking grew thicker and thicker from page to page, till they deepened at last into shame-faced self-confessions of maiden love, and culminated in the end into that one passionate avowal, 'Sailor or no sailor, oh, I love him, I love him. I love him with all my heart; and if he asks me, I shall accept him.'

When he came to that page, Kathleen saw by the moisture rising thick in his eyes what point he had reached. He looked across at her imploringly.

'Oh, Kathleen, I may?' he cried, trying to seize her hand. But still Kathleen waved him back.

'No, not yet,' she said in a tone half relenting, half stern. 'Not yet. You must read it all through. You must let me *prove* myself innocent.'

She said it proudly yet tenderly, for she *knew* the

proof was there. And after all she had suffered, she did not shrink for a moment from letting Arnold so read her heart's inmost secret.

He read on and on. Then came at last that day when the Canon recognised him in the side-canal by San Giovanni e Paolo. Arnold drew a deep breath.

'It was *he* who found me out, then?' he said, for the first time admitting his long-hidden identity.

'Yes, it was he who found you out,' Kathleen answered, leaning forward. 'And I saw at once he was right; for I had half suspected it myself, of course, from those words of yours he quoted. And, Arnold, do you know, the first thought that crossed my mind—for I'm a woman, and have my prejudices—the first thought was this: "Oh, how glad I am to think I should have singled him out for myself, out of pure, pure love, without knowing anything of him; yet that he should turn out in the end to be so great a gentleman of so ancient a lineage." And the second thing that struck me was this: 'Oh, how sorry I am, after all, I should have surprised his secret; for he wished to keep it from me; he wished perhaps to surprise me; and it may grieve him that I should have learnt it like this, prematurely." But I never knew then what misery it was to bring upon me.'

'Kathleen,' the young man cried imploringly, 'I *must!* I *must* this time!' and he stretched his arms out to her.

'No,' Kathleen cried, still waving him back, but flushing rosy red; 'I am not yet absolved. You must read to the very end. You must know the whole truth of it.'

Again Arnold read on; for Kathleen had written at great length the history of that day, that terrible day,

much blotted with tears on the pages of her diary, when the Canon went away, and her mother 'spoiled all' with Arnold Willoughby. When he came to that heart-broken cry of a wounded spirit, Arnold rose from his place; he could contain himself no longer. With tears in his eyes, he sprang towards her eagerly.

This time, at last, Kathleen did not prevent him.

'Am I absolved?' she murmured low, as he caught her in his arms and kissed her.

And Arnold, clasping her tight, made answer through his tears:

'My darling, my darling, it's I, not you, who stand in need of absolution. I have cruelly wronged you. I can never forgive myself for it.'

'But *I* can forgive you,' Kathleen murmured, nestling close to him.

For some minutes they sat there, hand in hand, supremely happy. They had no need for words in that more eloquent silence. Then Arnold spoke again, very sadly, with a sudden reminder of all that had happened meanwhile:

'But, Kathleen, even now, I ought never to have spoken to you. This is only to ease our souls. Things are still where they were for every other purpose. My darling, how am I to tell you it? I can never marry you now. I have only just recovered you, to lose you again instantly.'

Kathleen held his hand in hers still.

'Why so, dear?' she asked, too serenely joyous now (as is a woman's wont), at her love recovered, to trouble her mind much about such enigmatic sayings.

'Because,' Arnold cried, 'I have nothing to marry you with; and this maimed hand—it was crushed in an iceberg accident this summer—I'll tell you all

about it by-and-by—makes it more impossible than ever for me to earn a livelihood. Oh, Kathleen, if I hadn't been carried away by my feelings, and by what that dear good fellow Mortimer told me—he showed me your letter—I would never have come back like this to see you without some previous explanation. I would have written to tell you beforehand how hopeless it all was, how helpless a creature was coming home to claim you.'

'Then, I'm glad they *did* carry you away,' Kathleen answered, smiling; 'for I'd ten thousand times rather see you yourself, Arnold, now everything's cleared up, than any number of letters.'

'But everything's *not* cleared up; that's the worst of it,' Arnold answered somewhat gloomily. 'At least as far as I'm concerned,' he went on in haste, for he saw a dark shadow pass over Kathleen's sweet face. 'I mean, I'm afraid I'm misleading you myself now. You think, dear Kathleen, the man who has come home to you is an English peer; practically and financially, he's nothing of the sort. He's a sailor at best, or not even a sailor, but the merest bare wreck of one. Here, a sheer hulk, stands Arnold Willoughby. You probably imagine I got rid of my position and masqueraded in seamen's clothes out of pure, pure fun, only just to try you. I did nothing of the sort, my darling. I renounced my birthright, once and for ever, partly on conscientious grounds, and partly on grounds of personal dignity. I may have done right; I may have done wrong; but, at any rate, all that's long since irrevocable. It's past and gone now, and can never be reconsidered. It's a closed chapter. I was once an Earl: I am an Earl no longer. The man who asks you—who dare hardly

ask you—for your love to-day, is, to all intents and purposes, mere Arnold Willoughby, a common sailor, unfit for work, and an artist too hopelessly maimed for any further painting. In short, a man without fixed occupation or means of livelihood.'

Kathleen clung to his hand. 'I knew as much already,' she answered bravely, smoothing it with her own. 'That is to say, at least, I knew from the day you went away from Venice, and still more from the day when your cousin's claim was allowed to hold good by the House of Lords, that you had relinquished once for all your right to the peerage. I knew a man so just and good as you are would never allow your cousin to assume the title as his own, and then rob him again of it. I knew that if ever you came back to me, it would be as plain Arnold Willoughby, fighting your own battle on equal terms against the world; and, Arnold, now you're here, I don't care a pin on what terms or under what name you come; it's enough for me to have you here again with me!'

'Thank you, Kathleen,' Arnold said very low, with a thrill of deep joy. 'My darling, you're too good to me.'

'But that's not all,' Kathleen went on with swimming eyes. 'Do you know, Arnold, while you were away, what I wanted you to come back for most was that I might set myself right with you; might make you admit I wasn't ever what you thought me; might justify my womanhood to you; might be myself once more to you. But see what a woman I am, after all! Now you're here, oh, my darling, it isn't *that* that I think about, nor even whether or not you'll ever be able to marry me; all I think of is simply this—how sweet and delightful and heavenly it is to have you here again by my side to talk to.'

She gazed at him with pure love in those earnest big eyes of hers. Arnold melted with joy.

'You speak like a true good woman, darling,' he answered in a penitent voice. 'And now I hear you speak so, I wonder to myself how on earth I could ever have had the heart to doubt you.'

So they sat and talked. One hour like that was well worth those two years of solitude and misery.

CHAPTER XXVI.

A QUESTION OF AUTHORSHIP.

And now that all was over, and her Arnold had come home to her, Kathleen Hesslegrave felt as if the rest mattered little. He was back; he knew all; he saw all; he understood all; he loved her once again far more dearly than ever. Woman-like, she was more than satisfied to have her lover by her side; all else was to her a mere question of detail.

And yet the problem for Arnold was by no means solved. He had no way as yet of earning his own living; still less had he any way of earning a living for Kathleen. Kathleen herself, indeed, happy enough to have found her sailor again, would have been glad to marry him as he stood, maimed hand and all, and to have worked at her art for him, as she had long worked for Reggie; but that, of course, Arnold could never have dreamed of. It would have been grotesque to give up the Axminster revenues on conscientious grounds, and then allow himself to be supported by a woman's labour. Rufus Mortimer, too, ever generous and ever chivalrous, would willingly have done any-

thing in his power to help them. But such help as that also Arnold felt to be impossible. He must fight out the battle of life on his own account to the bitter end; and though this last misfortune of his crushed hand was an accident that might have happened to any sailor any day, it made him feel none the less that painful consciousness he had often felt before, of his own inferiority and comparative inability to do for himself what he saw so many of his kind doing round him on every side without apparent effort. He didn't care to acknowledge himself a human failure.

Of course, he had the fifty pounds he had received for his translation of the Italian manuscript; but even Arnold Willoughby couldn't live on fifty pounds for ever, though, no doubt, he could make it go at least as far as anyone else of his class could. And it was only a stray windfall, not a means of livelihood. What Arnold wanted, now the sea was shut against him, and painting most difficult, was some alternative way of earning money for himself, and, if possible, for Kathleen. As to how he could do that, he had for the moment no idea; he merely straggled on upon his fifty pounds, spreading it out as thin as fifty pounds can be made to spread nowadays in this crowded Britain of ours.

But if this problem caused anxiety to Arnold Willoughby, it caused at least as much more to Rufus Mortimer. As a rule, people who have never known want themselves realize but vaguely the struggles and hardships of others who stand face to face with it. They have an easy formula—'Lazy beggars!'—which covers for their minds all possible grounds of failure or misfortune in other people. (Though they are not themselves always so remarkable for their industry.)

But Rufus Mortimer, with his delicately sensitive American nature—as sensitive in its way as Arnold's own—understood to the full the difficulties of the case; and having made himself responsible to some extent for Arnold's and Kathleen's happiness by bringing them together again, gave himself no little trouble, now that matter was arranged, to seek some suitable work in life for Arnold.

This, however, as it turned out, was no easy matter. Even backed up by Rufus Mortimer's influence, Arnold found there were few posts in life he could now adequately fill; while the same moral scruples that had made him in the first instance renounce altogether the Axminster property continued to prevent his accepting any post that he did not consider an honest and useful one. It occurred to Mortimer, therefore, one day when he met Reggie on Kathleen's doorstep, and, entering, found Kathleen herself with every sign of recent tears, that one of the first ways of helping the young couple would be the indirect one of getting rid of Reggie. He suspected that young gentleman of being a perpetual drain upon Kathleen's resources, and he knew him to have certainly no such conscientious scruples. So, after a little brief telegraphic communication with his firm in America, he sent one morning for Reggie himself, 'on important business'; and Reggie, delighted by anticipation at the phrase, put on his best necktie and his onyx links, and drove round (in a hansom) to Mortimer's house in Great Stanhope Street.

Mortimer plunged at once into the midst of affairs.

'Suppose you were to get a post of three hundred and fifty a year in America, would you take it?' he inquired.

Reggie brightened at the suggestion.

'Pounds, not dollars, of course?' he answered with characteristic caution, for where money was concerned, Reggie's mind was pure intellect.

Rufus Mortimer nodded.

'Yes, pounds, not dollars,' he said. 'A clerk's post in my place in the States; railway engineering works, you know. We control the business.'

'It *might* suit me,' Reggie answered with great deliberation, impressed with the undesirability of letting himself go too cheap. 'Three hundred and fifty; or, say, four hundred.'

'I beg your pardon,' Rufus Mortimer interposed with bland decision. 'I said three hundred and fifty. I did *not* say four hundred. And the questions before the house are simply these two—first, whether you care to accept such a post or not; and, second, whether I shall find you're qualified to accept it.'

'Oh, I see,' Reggie answered, taken aback; for he had not yet met Rufus Mortimer in this his alternative character as the stern capitalist. 'Whereabouts is your place? So much depends upon the locality.'

'It's in Philadelphia,' Mortimer answered, smiling.

He could see at a glance Reggie was hesitating as to whether he could tear himself away from the Gaiety, and the dear boys, and the gross mud-honey of town in general, to emigrate to America.

Reggie held his peace for a moment. He was calculating the pros and cons of the question at issue. It spelt expatriation, of course; that he recognised at once; so far from the theatres, the racecourses, the Park, the dear boys of the Tivoli, and Charlie Owen. But, still, he was young, and he would always have

Florrie. Perhaps there might be 'life' even in Philadelphia.

'Is it a big town?' he asked dubiously, for his primæval notions of American geography were distinctly hazy.

'The third biggest in the Union,' Mortimer answered, eyeing him hard.

'In the what?' Reggie repeated, somewhat staggered at the sound; visions of some huge workhouse rose dimly in the air before his mental view.

'In the United States,' Mortimer answered with a compassionate smile. 'In America, if it comes to that. The third biggest in America. About three-quarters the size of Paris. Will a population of a million afford scope enough for you?'

'It *sounds* well,' Reggie admitted. 'And I suppose there are amusements there—something to occupy a fellow's mind in his spare time? or else I don't put much stock in it.'

'I think the resources of Philadelphia will be equal to amusing you,' Mortimer answered grimly. 'It's a decent-sized village.' He didn't dwell much upon the converse fact that Reggie would have to work for his three hundred and fifty. 'My people in America will show him all that soon enough,' he thought. 'The great thing just now is to get him well out of England, by hook or by crook, and leave the way clear for that angel and Willoughby.'

For Rufus Mortimer, having once espoused Arnold Willoughby's cause, was almost as anxious to see him satisfactorily settled in life as if it had been his own love-affairs he was working for, not his most dangerous rival's.

The offer was a tempting one. After a little hum-

ming and hawing, and some explanation by Mortimer of the duties of the situation—the last thing on earth that Reggie himself would ever have troubled his head about under the circumstances—the young man about town at last consented to accept the post offered to him, and to ship himself forthwith from his native land, with Florrie in tow, at Rufus Mortimer's expense, by an early steamer.

'A town of a million people,' he observed to Florrie, '*must* have decent amusements, even in America.'

And now that that prime encumbrance was clear out of the way, Mortimer's next desire was to find something to do for Arnold, though Arnold was certainly a most difficult man to help in the matter of an appointment. That horrid conscience of his was always coming in to interfere with everything. Mortimer and Kathleen had ventured to suggest, indeed, that under these altered circumstances, when his hand made it almost impossible for him to get work of any sort, he should disclose his personality to the new Lord Axminster, and accept some small allowance out of the Membury Castle property. But against that suggestion Arnold stood quite firm.

'No, no,' he said; 'I may live or I may starve; but I won't go back upon my whole life and principles. I gave up my property in order that I might live by my own exertions; and by my own exertions I will live, or go to the wall manfully. I don't demand now that I should earn my livelihood by manual labour, as I once desired to do. Under these altered conditions, having lost the use of my hand in the pursuit of an honest trade for the benefit of humanity, I'm justified, I believe, in earning my livelihood in any way that my fellow-creatures are willing to pay me for; and I'll

take in future any decent work that such a maimed being as myself is fitted for. But I won't come down upon my cousin Algy. It wouldn't be fair; it wouldn't be right; it wouldn't be consistent; it wouldn't be honest. I'm dead by law; dead by the decision of the highest court in the kingdom; and dead I will remain for all legal purposes. Algy has succeeded to the title and estates in that belief, which I have not only permitted him to hold, but have deliberately fostered. For myself and all who come after me, I have definitely got rid of my position as a peer, and have chosen to become a common sailor. If I were to burst in upon Algy now with proof of my prior claim, I would upset and destroy his peace of mind; make him doubt for the position and prospects of his children; and burden him with a sense of insecurity in his tenure which I have no right in the world to disturb his life with. When once I did it, I did it once for all; to go back upon it now would be both cruel and cowardly.'

'You're right,' Kathleen cried, holding his hand in her own. 'I see you're right, my darling; and if ever I marry you, I will marry you clearly on that understanding, that you are and always will be plain Arnold Willoughby.'

So Rufus Mortimer could do nothing but watch and wait. Meanwhile, Arnold went round London at the pitiful task of answering advertisements for clerks and other small posts, and seeking in vain for some light employment. Winter was drawing on; and it became clearer and clearer each day to Mortimer that in Arnold's present state of health he ought, if possible, to spend the coldest months in the South of Europe. But how get him to do it? That was now the puzzle.

Mortimer was half afraid he had only rescued Kathleen's lover, and brought them together again in peace, in order to see him die with his first winter in England. And it was no use to urge upon him the acceptance of a temporary loan, or even to ask him to go abroad on the strength of that fifty pounds; for, as matters now stood, Arnold was so anxious to husband his funds to the utmost and to look out for future work, that nothing would induce him to move away from London.

While things were in this condition, Rufus was startled one day, as he sat in his padded armchair in a West-End club, reading a weekly paper, to see Arnold Willoughby's name staring him full in the face from every part of a two-column article. He fixed his eyes on the floating words that seemed to dance before his sight. 'If this is a first attempt,' the reviewer said, 'we must congratulate Mr. Willoughby upon a most brilliant début in the art of fiction.' And again: 'We know not whether the name of "Arnold Willoughby" is the writer's real designation, or a mere *nom de guerre;* but in any case we can predict for the entertaining author of "An Elizabethan Seadog" a brilliant career as a writer of the new romance of history.'—'Mr. Willoughby's style is careful and polished; his knowledge of the dialect of the sea is "peculiar and extensive"; while his fertility of invention is really something stupendous. We doubt, indeed, whether any Elizabethan sailor of actual life could ever have described his Spanish adventures in such graphic and admirable language as Mr. Willoughby puts into the mouth of his imaginary hero; but that is a trivial blemish: literature is literature: as long as the narrative im-

poses upon the reader for the moment, which it undoubtedly does, we are ready to overlook the unhistorical character of the thrilling details, and the obvious improbability that such a person as Master John Collingham of Holt in Norfolk would have been able to address the Council of Ten with such perfect fluency in "very choice Italian."'

Rufus Mortimer laid down the paper in a tumult of delight. Here at last he saw a chance for the solution of the problem of Arnold's future. Though art had failed him, he might live by literature. To be sure, one swallow doesn't make a summer, nor one good review (alas!) the fortune of a volume. But Rufus Mortimer didn't know that; and he felt sure in his heart that a man who could write so as to merit such praise from one of the most notoriously critical of modern organs, must certainly be able to make a living by his pen, even if he had only a left hand left wherewith to wield it. So off he rushed at once in high glee to Arnold Willoughby's, only stopping on the way to buy a copy of the review at the railway bookstall in the nearest underground station.

When he reached Arnold's lodgings, now removed much further West, near Kathleen Hesslegrave's rooms, he hurried upstairs in a fervour of good spirits, quite rejoiced to be the first to bring such happy tidings. Arnold read the review hastily; then he looked up at Mortimer, who stood expectant by; and his face grew almost comical in its despair and despondency.

'Oh, this is dreadful!' he exclaimed under his breath. 'Dreadful, dreadful, dreadful!'

'Dreadful?' Mortimer interposed, quite taken aback.

'Why, Willoughby, I was delighted to be the first to bring it to you. I thought you'd be so awfully glad to see it. What on earth do you disapprove of? It's all so favourable.'

Did the man expect mere fulsome adulation?

'Favourable? Oh yes,' Arnold answered; 'it's favourable enough, for that matter: but just look how they treat it! In spite of my repeated and reiterated statement that the manuscript was a genuine Elizabethan document, they insist on speaking of it as an original romance, and attributing the authorship to *me*, who only translated it. They doubt my word about it!'

'But that doesn't matter much,' Mortimer cried, severely practical, 'as long as attention is drawn to the work. It'll make the book sell; and if ever you should want to write anything else on your own account, it'll give you a better start and secure you attention.'

'I don't want attention under false pretences,' Arnold retorted. 'One doesn't like to be doubted, and one doesn't want to get credit for work one hasn't done. I should hate to be praised so. It's only the translation that's mine. I've none of these imaginative gifts the critic credits me with. Indeed, I've half a mind to sit down this minute to write and explain that I don't deserve either their praise or their censure.'

From this judicious course Mortimer did not seek to dissuade him; for, being an American born, he thoroughly understood the value of advertisement; and he knew that a lively correspondence on the authenticity of the book could not fail to advertise it better than five hundred reviews, good, bad, or indif-

ferent. So he held his peace, and let Arnold do as he would about his reputation for veracity.

As they were talking it over, however, the door opened once more, and in rushed Kathleen, brimming over with excitement, and eager to show Arnold another review which she had happened to come across in a daily paper.

Arnold took it up and read it. His face changed as he did so; and Mortimer, who looked over his shoulder as he read, could see that this review, too, contained precisely the same cause of complaint, from Arnold's point of view, as the other one—it attributed the book, as an original romance, to the transcriber and translator, and complimented him on his brilliant and creative imagination. Here was indeed a difficulty. Arnold could hardly show Kathleen the same distress at the tone of the notice which he had shown Rufus Mortimer; she came in so overflowing with womanly joy at his success that he hadn't the heart to damp it; so he tried his best to look as if he liked it, and said as little about the matter, either way, as possible.

Mortimer, however, took a different view of the situation.

'This is good,' he said; 'very good. These two articles strike the keynote. Your book is certainly going to make a success. It will boom through England. I'm sorry now, Willoughby, you sold the copyright for all time outright to them.'

CHAPTER XXVII.

CONSCIENTIOUS SCRUPLES.

This is an age of booms. Institution and name have come over to us from America. When a thing succeeds at all, it succeeds, as a rule, to the very top of its deserving. So in a few weeks' time it was abundantly clear that 'An Elizabethan Seadog' was to be one of the chief booms of the publishing season. Everybody bought it; everybody read it; everybody talked about it. Conan Doyle and Rudyard Kipling stood trembling for their laurels. And to this result Arnold Willoughby himself quite unconsciously contributed by writing two or three indignant letters to papers that reviewed the book as his own production, complaining of the slight thus put upon his veracity. Of course he would have been wholly incapable of inventing this idea as an advertising dodge; but he wrote with such earnestness in defence of his own true account of his antiquarian find, that everybody read his passionate declarations with the utmost amusement.

'He's immense!' Mr. Stanley remarked, overjoyed, to his partner, Mr. Lockhart. 'That man's immense. He's simply stupendous. What a glorious liar! By far the finest bit of fiction in the whole book is that marvellously realistic account of how he picked up the manuscript in a small shop in Venice; and now he caps it all by going and writing to the *Times* that it's every word of it true, and that, if these implied calumnies continue any longer, he will be forced at last to vindicate his character by a trial for libel!

Delicious! delicious! It's the loveliest bit of advertising I've seen for years; and just to think of his getting the *Times* to aid and abet him in it!'

'But have you seen to-day's *Athenæum?*' Mr. Lockhart responded cheerfully.—'No? Well, here it is, and it's finer and finer. Their reviewer said last week, you know, they'd very much like to inspect the original manuscript of such a unique historical document, and humorously hinted that it ought to be preserved in the British Museum. Well, hang me if Willoughby doesn't pretend this week to take their banter quite seriously, and proceed to spin a cock-and-bull yarn about how the original got lost at sea on a Dundee sealer! Magnificent! magnificent! The unblushing audacity of it! And he does it all with such an air. Nobody ever yet equalled him as an amateur advertiser. The cheek of the man's so fine. He'd say anything to screw himself into notoriety anyhow. And the queer part of it all is that his work's quite good enough to stand by itself on its own merits without that. He's a splendid story-teller. Only, he doesn't confine the art of fiction to its proper limits.'

Whether it was by virtue of Arnold Willoughby's indignant disclaimers, however, or of its intrinsic merits as a work of adventure, 'An Elizabethan Seadog' was all the rage at the libraries. Mr. Mudie, crowned Apollo of our British Parnassus, advertised at once a thousand copies. 'And it's so wonderful, you know,' all the world said to its neighbour; 'it was written, they say, by a common sailor!' When Arnold heard that, it made him almost ready to disclose his real position in life; for he couldn't bear to take credit for extraordinary genius and self-education, when, as a matter of fact, his English diction was the

net result of the common gentlemanly sojourn at Harrow and Oxford. But he was obliged to bite his lips over this matter in silence. The praise showered upon the book, he felt, was none of his own making; half of it was due to Master John Collingham of Holt in Norfolk, whom nobody believed in; and the other half was due to the actual facts of the Elizabethan narrative. Whatever little credit might accrue from the style and workmanship of the translation, Arnold recognised he obtained under false pretences as the self-taught genius, while as a matter of fact he had always possessed every possible advantage of birth, breeding, and education. So it came to pass by the irony of circumstance that he, the man who of all others desired to be judged on his merits as a human being, got all the false credit of a book he had never written, and a difficulty surmounted which had never existed.

The position positively preyed upon Arnold Willoughby's spirits. He saw he was misunderstood. People took him for just the opposite of what he really was; they thought him a clever, pushing, self-advertising adventurer—him, the sensitive, shrinking, self-depreciatory martyr to an over-exacting conscience. And there was no way out of it, except by ruining his cousin Algy's position. He must endure it in silence, and stand the worst that people could say or think of him. After all, to be, not to seem, was the goal of his ambition; what he was in himself, not what people thought of him, really mattered. There was one man on earth whose good opinion he desired to conciliate and to retain—one man from whom he could never escape, morning, noon, or night; and that man was Arnold Willoughby. As long as he earned the appro-

bation of his own conscience, the rest was but a matter of minor importance.

Nor did the boom promise to do Arnold much permanent or pecuniary good. To be sure, it gained him no small notoriety; but, then, notoriety was the very thing he most wished to avoid. London hostesses were anxious after their kind to secure the new lion for their 'at homes' and their garden parties; and Rufus Mortimer and Kathleen Hesslegrave were besieged by good ladies, as soon as it was known they had made Arnold's acquaintance at Venice, with vicarious invitations for him for dinner, lunch, or evening. But Arnold was not to be drawn. 'So very retiring, you know!' people said; 'doesn't like to make himself cheap. Quite a recluse, Mr. Mortimer tells me. That's often the way with these men of genius. Think so much of their favours! Don't want to let us every-day people have the benefit of their society.' But Arnold's point of view was simply this—that if Canon Valentine had been able to recognise him, so might somebody else; and therefore he held it best to avoid that great world he had fled long before, and to keep to his own little circle of artistic acquaintances.

Meanwhile, the book made money. It was making money daily. And under these circumstances, it occurred to Mr. Stanley one morning to observe to his partner:

'I say, Lockhart, don't you think it's about time for us to send a little cheque to that fellow Willoughby?'

Mr. Lockhart looked up from his papers.

'Well, you're right, perhaps,' he answered. 'He's a first-rate man, there's no doubt, and we had the

book from him cheap. We gave him fifty pounds for it. We've made—let me see—I should say, seven hundred. Let's send him a cheque for a hundred guineas. 'Pon my soul, he deserves it.'

'All right,' the senior partner answered, drawing out his cheque-book and proceeding to act at once upon the generous suggestion.

Generous, I say, and say rightly, though it is the fashion among certain authors to talk about the meanness and stinginess of publishers. As a matter of observation, I should say, on the contrary, there are no business men on earth so just and so generous. In no other trade would a man who has bought an article for a fair price in the open market, and then has found it worth more than the vendor expected, feel himself called upon to make that vendor a free gift of a portion of his profits. But publishers often do it; indeed, almost as a matter of course, expect to do it. Intercourse with an elevating and ennobling profession has produced in the class an exceptionally high standard of generosity and enlightened self-interest.

As soon as Arnold received that cheque, he went round with it at once, much disturbed, to Kathleen's.

'What ought I to do?' he asked. 'This is *very* embarrassing.'

'Why cash it, of course,' Kathleen answered. 'What on earth should you wish to return it for, dear Arnold?'

'Well, you see,' Arnold replied, looking shamefaced, 'it's sent under a misconception. They persist in believing I *wrote* that book. But *you* know I didn't; I only discovered and transcribed and translated it. Therefore, they're paying me for what I never did.

And as a man of honour, I confess I don't see how I can take their money.'

'But they made it out of your translation,' Kathleen answered, secretly admiring him all the time in her own heart of hearts for his sturdy honesty. 'After all, you discovered the book; you deciphered it; you translated it. The original's lost; nobody else can ever make another translation. The copyright of it was yours, and you sold it to them under its real value. They're only returning you now a small part of what you would have made if you had published it yourself at your own risk; and I think you're entitled to it.'

Arnold was economist enough to see at a glance through that specious feminine fallacy.

'Oh no,' he answered with warmth. 'That's not the fair way to put it. If I'd had capital enough at the time, and had published it myself, I would have risked my own money, and would have been fairly entitled to whatever I got upon it. But I hadn't the capital, don't you see? and even if I had, I wouldn't have cared to chance it. That's what the publisher is for. He *has* capital, and he chooses to risk it in the publication of books, some of which are successes, and some of which are failures. He expects the gains on the one to balance and make up for the losses on the other. If he had happened to lose by the "Elizabethan Seadog," I wouldn't have expected him to come down upon me to make good his deficit. Therefore, of course, when he happens to have made by it, I can't expect him to come forward, out of pure generosity, and give me a portion of what are strictly his own profits.'

Kathleen saw he was right; her intelligence went with

him; yet she couldn't bear to see him let a hundred pounds slip so easily through his fingers—though she would have loved and respected him a great deal the less had he not been so constituted. 'But surely,' she said, 'they must know themselves they bought it too cheap of you, or else they would never dream of sending you this conscience-money.'

'No,' Arnold answered resolutely: 'I don't see it that way. When I sold them the book, fifty pounds was its full market value. I was glad to get so much, and glad to sell to them. Therefore, they bought it at its fair price for the moment. The money-worth of a manuscript, especially a manuscript by an unknown writer, must always be to a great extent a matter of speculation. I didn't think the thing worth fifty pounds when I offered it for sale to Stanley and Lockhart; and when they named their price, I jumped at the arrangement. If they had proposed to me two alternative modes of purchase at the time—fifty pounds down, or a share of the profits—I would have said at once: "Give me the money in hand, with no risk or uncertainty." Therefore, how can I be justified, now I know the thing has turned out a complete success, in accepting the share I would have refused beforehand?'

This was a hard nut for Kathleen. As a matter of logic—being a reasonable creature—she saw for herself Arnold was wholly right; yet she couldn't bear to see him throw away a hundred pounds, that was so much to him now, on a mere point of sentiment. So she struck out a middle course.

'Let's go and ask Mr. Mortimer,' she said. 'He's a clear-headed business man, as well as a painter.

He'll tell us how it strikes him from the point of view of unadulterated business.'

'Nobody else's opinion, as mere opinion, would count for anything with me,' Arnold answered quietly. 'My conscience has only itself to reckon with, not anybody outside me. But perhaps Mortimer might have some reason to urge—some element in the problem that hasn't yet struck me. If so, of course I shall be prepared to give it whatever weight it may deserve in forming my decision.'

So they walked round together to Rufus Mortimer's London house. Mortimer was in his studio, painting away at an ideal picture of 'Love Self-slain,' which was not, indeed, without its allegorical application to himself and Kathleen and Arnold Willoughby. For it represented the god as a winged young man, very sweet and sad-looking, mortally wounded, yet trying to pass on a lighted torch in his hands to a more fortunate comrade who bent over him in pity. Kathleen took little notice of the canvas, however—for love, alas! is always a wee bit selfish to the feelings of outsiders—but laid her statement of the case before Mortimer succinctly. She told him all they had said, down to Arnold's last remark, that if Rufus had any new element in the problem to urge, he would be prepared to give it full weight in his decision.

When she reached that point, Rufus broke in with a smile.

'Why, of course I have,' he answered. 'I'm a capitalist myself; and I see at a glance the weak point of your argument. You forget that these publishers are business men; they are thinking not only of the past but of the future. Gratitude, we all know,

is a lively sense of favours to come. It's pretty much the same with the generosity of publishers. As a business man, I don't for a moment believe in it. They see you've made a hit, and they think you're likely to make plenty more hits in future. They know they've paid you a low price for your book, and they've made a lot of money for themselves out of publishing it. They don't want to drive away the goose that lays the golden eggs; so they offer you a hundred pounds as a sort of virtual retaining fee—an inducement to you to bring your next book for issue to them, not to any other publisher.'

'That settles the thing then,' Arnold answered decisively.

'You mean, you'll keep the cheque?' Kathleen exclaimed with beaming eyes.

'Oh dear no,' Arnold replied with a very broad smile. 'Under those circumstances, of course, there's nothing at all left for me but to return it instantly.'

'Why so?' Kathleen cried, amazed. She knew Arnold too well by this time to suppose he would do anything but what seemed to him the absolutely right and honest conduct.

'Why, don't you see,' Arnold answered, 'they send me this cheque always under that same mistaken notion that it was I who wrote the "Elizabethan Seadog," and therefore that I can write any number more such works of imagination? Now, the real fact is I'm a mere translator—a perfectly prosaic every-day translator. I never so much as tried to write a story in my life; and if they think they're going to get future books out of me, and be recouped in that way, they're utterly mistaken. I haven't the faintest idea of how to write a novel. So it wouldn't be fair

to accept their money under such false pretences. I shall send their cheque back to them.'

'Don't do that,' Mortimer said, laying one hand on his shoulder. 'Nobody ever knows what he can do till he tries. Why not set to work at a similar novel, and see what you can make of it? If you fail, no matter; and if you succeed, why, there you are; your problem is solved for you. The "Elizabethan Seadog" would give you a fair start, right or wrong, with the reviewers; and if you've anything in you, you ought to pull through with it.'

But Arnold shook his head.

'No, no,' he said firmly; 'that would never do. It would be practically dishonest. I can't describe myself as the author of the "Elizabethan Seadog," for that I'm not; and if I call myself even the editor or translator, I should seem to be claiming a sort of indirect and suggested authorship to which I've no right. I must let the thing drop. I'm almost sorry now I ever began with it.'

'At any rate,' Mortimer cried, 'come along with me now to Stanley and Lockhart's.'

'Oh, I'll come along with you, if that's all,' Arnold responded readily. 'I want to go round and return this cheque to them.'

CHAPTER XXVIII.

MORTIMER STRIKES HOME.

When Arnold arrived at Stanley and Lockhart's, it almost seemed to him as if the sun had gone back upon the dial of his lifetime to the days when he was

still an Earl and a somebody. True, the shop-boy of whom he inquired, in a timid voice, if he could see one of the partners, scarcely deigned to look up from his ledger at first, as he murmured, in the surly accent of the underling, 'Name, please?' But the moment the answer came, 'Mr. Arnold Willoughby,' the boy left off writing, awe-struck, and scrambling down from his high perch, opened the low wooden door with a deferential, 'This way, sir. I'll ask if the head of the firm is engaged.—Mr. Jones, can Mr. Stanley see Mr. Arnold Willoughby?'

That name was like magic. Mr. Jones led him on with attentive politeness. Arnold followed upstairs, as in the good old days when he was an unchallenged Earl, attended and heralded by an ushering clerk in a most respectful attitude. Even the American millionaire himself, whom the functionaries at once recognised, scarcely met with so much honour in that mart of books as the reputed author of the book of the season. For Willoughby spelt money for the firm just that moment. And the worst of it all was, as Arnold reflected to himself with shame and regret, all this deference was being paid him no more on his own personal merits than ever, but simply and solely because the publishing world persisted in believing he had written the story, which as a matter of fact he had only deciphered, transcribed, and Englished.

In the counting-house, Mr. Stanley met him with outstretched arms, metaphorically speaking. He rubbed his hands with delight. He was all bland expectancy. The new and rising author had come round, no doubt, to thank him in person for the cheque the firm had sent him by the last post of yesterday.

'Charmed to see you, I'm sure, Mr. Willoughby,' the senior partner exclaimed, motioning him with one hand to the chair of honour; 'and you too, Mr. Mortimer. Lovely weather, isn't it?—Well, the reception your book has had both from press and public is flattering—most flattering. We are selling it fast still; in fact, this very day I've given orders to pull off another thousand of the library edition. I'm sure it must be most gratifying to you. It's seldom a first book comes in for such an ovation.'

Arnold hardly knew what to answer; this cordiality flurried him; but after a short preamble, he drew forth the cheque and explained in a very few words that he couldn't accept it.

Mr. Stanley stared at him, and rang his little bell.

'Ask Mr. Lockhart to step this way,' he said, with a puzzled look. 'This is a matter to be considered by all four of us in council.'

Mr. Lockhart stepped that way with cheerful alacrity; and to him, too, Arnold explained in the briefest detail why he had refused the cheque. The two partners glanced at one another. They hummed and hawed nervously. Then Mr. Lockhart said in slow tones:

'Well, this is a disappointment to us, I confess, Mr. Willoughby. To tell you the truth, though we desired to divide the profits more justly than they were being divided by our original agreement, as is our habit in such cases, still, I won't deny we had also looked forward to the pleasure of publishing other books from your pen on subsequent occasions.' (Mr. Lockhart was a pompous and correct old gentleman, who knew how to talk in private life the set language

of the business letter.) 'We hoped, in point of fact, you would have promised us a second book for the coming season.'

Arnold's face flushed fiery red. This persistent disbelief made him positively angry. In a few forcible words, he explained once more to the astonished publisher that he had not written 'An Elizabethan Seadog'; and that he doubted his ability to write anything like it. In any case, he must beg them to take back their cheque, and not to expect work of any sort from him in future.

The partners stared at him in blank astonishment. They glanced at one another curiously. Then Mr. Lockhart rose, nodded, and left the room. Mr. Stanley, left alone, engaged them in conversation as best he could, for a minute or two. At the end of that time a message came to the senior partner:

'Mr. Lockhart says, sir, could you speak to him for one moment?'

'Certainly,' Mr. Stanley answered.—'Will you excuse me a minute, if you please, Mr. Willoughby? There's the last review of your book; perhaps you'd like to glance at it.' And with another queer look he disappeared mysteriously.

'Well,' he said to his partner, as soon as they were alone in Mr. Lockhart's sanctum, 'what on earth does this mean? Do you suppose somebody else has offered him higher terms than he thinks he'll get from us? Jones and Burton may have bribed him. He's a thundering liar, any way, and one doesn't know what the dickens to believe about him.'

'No,' Mr. Lockhart replied confidently; 'that's not it, I'm sure, Stanley. If he were a rogue, he'd have pocketed our cheque without a word, and taken

his next book all the same to the other people. It isn't that, I'm certain, as sure as my name's Lockhart. Don't you see what it is? The fellow's mad; he really thinks now he didn't write the "Seadog." Success has turned his head. It's an awful pity. He began with the story as an innocent deception; he went on with it afterwards as an excellent advertisement; now he's gone off his head with unexpected triumph, and really believes he didn't write it, but discovered it. However, it's all the same to us. I tell you what we must do: ask him, if ever he discovers any more interesting manuscripts, to give us the first refusal of his translation or decipherment.'

But when they returned a few minutes later with this notable proposition, Arnold could only burst out laughing.

'No, no,' he said, really amused at last. 'I see what you think. Mr. Mortimer will tell you I'm as sane as you are. You fancy I'm mad; but you're quite mistaken. However, I can honestly promise you what you ask—that if I have ever again any publishing business to transact, I will bring my work first to you for refusal.'

So the interview ended. Comic as it was from one point of view, it yet saddened Arnold somewhat. He couldn't help being struck by this persistent fate which made him all through life be praised or admired, not for what he really was or really had done, but for some purely adventitious, or even unreal, circumstance. He went away and resumed once more his vain search for work. But as day after day went by, and he found nobody ready to employ a practically one-armed man, with no recommendation save that of having served his time as a common sailor, his heart sank within

him. The weather grew colder, too, and his weak lung began to feel the chilly fogs of London. Worst of all, he was keeping Kathleen also in England; for she wouldn't go South and leave him, though her work demanded that she should winter as usual in Venice, where she could paint the range of subjects for which alone, after the hateful fashion of the present day, she could find a ready market. All this made Arnold not a little anxious, the more so as his fifty pounds, no matter how well husbanded, were beginning to run out and leave his exchequer empty.

In this strait, it was once more Rufus Mortimer, their unfailing friend, who came to Arnold's and Kathleen's assistance. He went round to Arnold's rooms one afternoon full of serious warning.

'Look here, my dear Willoughby,' he said; 'there is such a thing as carrying conscientious scruples to an impracticable excess. I don't pretend to act up to my principles myself; if I did, I should be compelled to sell all I have, like you, and give it to the poor, or their modern equivalent, whatever that may be, in the dominant political economy of the moment. But, somehow, I don't feel inclined to go such lengths for my principles. I lock them up in a cabinet as interesting curiosities. Still, you, you know, rush into the opposite extreme. The past is past, and can't, of course, be undone; though I don't exactly see that you were bound in the first instance quite so utterly to disinherit yourself—to cut yourself off with the proverbial shilling. But as things now stand, I think it's not right of you merely for the sake of pampering your individual conscience—which, after all, may be just as much mistaken as anybody else's conscience—to let Miss Hesslegrave live in such perpetual anxiety

on your behalf. For her sake, I feel sure, you ought to make up your mind to sacrifice to some extent your personal scruples, and at least have a try at writing something or other of your own for Stanley and Lockhart. You could publish it simply under your present name as Arnold Willoughby, without reference in any way to the "Elizabethan Seadog"; and if, in spite of all your repeated disclaimers, people still persist in describing you as the author of the book you only translated, why, that's their fault, not yours, and I don't see why you need trouble yourself one penny about it.'

'I've thought of that these last few days,' Arnold answered, yielding slightly; 'and I've even begun to plan out a skeleton plot for a projected story; but, then, it's—oh, so different from "An Elizabethan Seadog"; a drama of the soul; a very serious performance. I couldn't really imagine anything myself in the least like Master John Collingham's narrative. I've no taste for romance. What I think I might do is a story of the sad lives of the seafaring folk I have lived and worked among—a realistic tale of hard toil and incessant privation and heroic suffering. But all that's so different from the Elizabethan buccaneer, that I don't suppose any publisher would care to touch it.'

'Don't you believe it,' Mortimer answered with decision. 'They'd jump at it like grizzlies. Your name would be enough now to make any book go. I don't say more than one; if your next should be a failure, you'll come down like a stick, as you went up like a rocket. I've seen more than one of these straw fires flare to heaven in my time, both in literature and art; and I know how they burn out after the first flare-up

—a mere flash in the pan, a red blaze of the moment. But, at any rate, you could try: if you succeeded, well and good; if not, you'd at least be not a penny worse off than you are at present.'

'Well, I've worked up my subject a bit in my own head,' Arnold answered more cheerfully; 'and I almost think I see my way to something that might possibly stand a chance of taking the public; but there's the difficulty of writing it. What can I do with this maimed hand? It won't hold a pen. And though I've tried with my left, I find it such slow work as far as I've yet got on with it.'

'Why not have a typewriter?' Mortimer exclaimed, with the quick practical sense of his countrymen. 'You could work it with one hand—not quite so quick as with two, of course, but, still, pretty easily.'

'I thought of that, too,' Arnold answered, looking down. 'But—they cost twenty pounds. And I haven't twenty pounds in the world to bless myself with.'

'If you'd let me make you a present of one——' Mortimer began; but Arnold checked him with a hasty wave of that imperious hand.

'Not for *her* sake?' the American murmured in a very low voice.

And Arnold answered gently: 'No, dear Mortimer, you kind, good friend—not even for her sake. There are still a few prejudices I retain even now from the days when I was a gentleman—and that is one of them.'

Mortimer rose from his seat.

'Well, leave it to me,' he said briskly. 'I think I see a way out of it.' And he left the room in haste, much to Arnold's mute wonder.

A few hours later he returned, bringing with him in triumph a mysterious paper of most legal dimensions. It was folded in three, and engrossed outside with big black letters, which seemed to imply that 'This Indenture' witnessed something really important.

'Now, all I want,' he said in a most business-like voice, laying the document before Arnold, 'is just your signature.'

'My signature!' Arnold answered, with a glance at the red wafers that adorned the instrument. 'Why, that's just the very thing I'm most particular about giving.'

'Oh, but this is quite simple, I assure you,' Mortimer replied with a persuasive smile. 'This is just a small agreement with Stanley and Lockhart. They covenant to pay you one hundred pounds down —look here, I've got the cheque in my pocket already —the merest formality—by way of advance on the royalties of a book you engage to write for them; a work of fiction, of whatever sort you choose, length, size, and style to be left to your discretion. And they're to publish it when complete, in the form that may seem to them most suitable for the purpose, giving you fifteen per cent. on the net price of all copies sold in perpetuity. And if I were you, Willoughby, I'd accept it offhand. And I'll tell you what I'd do: I'd start off at once post-haste to Venice, where you'd be near Miss Hesslegrave, and where she and you could talk the book over together while in progress.' He dropped his voice a little. 'Seriously, my dear fellow,' he said, 'you both of you look ill, and the sooner you can get away from this squalid village, I think, the better.'

Arnold read over the agreement with a critical eye.

'I see,' he said, 'they expressly state that they do not hold me to have written "An Elizabethan Seadog," but merely to have discovered, deciphered, and edited it.'

'Yes,' Mortimer replied with a cheerful smile. 'I'm rather proud of that clause. I foresaw that that interminably obtrusive old conscience of yours would step in with one of its puritanical objections, if I didn't distinctly stipulate for that exact proviso; so I made them put it in; and now I'm sure I don't know what you can possibly stick at; for it merely provides that they will pay you fifteen per cent. on any precious book you may care to write; and they're so perfectly sure of seeing their money again, that they'll give you a hundred pounds down on the nail for the mere promise to write it.'

'But suppose I were to die meanwhile,' Arnold objected, still staring at it, 'what insurance could they give themselves?'

Rufus Mortimer seized his friend by the waist perforce; pushed him bodily into a chair; placed a pen in his left hand, and laid the document before him.

'Upon my soul,' he said, half humorously, half angrily, 'that irrepressible conscience of yours is enough to drive any sane man out of his wits. There! not another word. Take the pen and sign.—Thank Heaven, that's done. I didn't ever think I could get you to do it. Now, before you've time to change what you're pleased to call your mind, I shall rush off in a cab and carry this straight to Stanley and Lockhart. Sign the receipt for the hundred pounds at once.—That's right! One must treat you

like a child, I see, or there's no doing anything with you. Now, I'm off. Don't you move from your chair till I come back again. Can't you see, you donkey, that if they want to be insured against the chance of your death, that's their affair, not yours? and that they have insured themselves already a dozen times over with the "Elizabethan Seadog?" '

'Stop, stop a moment,' Arnold cried, some new scruple suggesting itself; but Mortimer rushed headlong down the stairs without heeding him. He had a hansom in waiting below.

'To Stanley and Lockhart's,' he cried eagerly, 'near Hyde Park Corner.' And Arnold was left alone to reflect with himself upon the consequences of his now fairly irrevocable action.

In half an hour, once more Mortimer was back, quite radiant.

'Now, that's a bargain,' he said cheerily. 'We've sent it off to be duly stamped at Somerset House; and then you can't go back upon it without gross breach of contract. You're booked for it now, thank Heaven. Whether you can or you can't you've got to write a novel. You're under agreement to supply one, good, bad, or indifferent. Next, you must come out with me and choose a typewriter. We'll see for ourselves which is the best adapted to a man with one hand. And after that, we'll go straight and call on Miss Hesslegrave; for I shan't be satisfied now till I've packed you both off by quick train to Venice.'

'I wonder,' Arnold said, 'if ever fiction before was so forcibly extorted by brute violence from any man?'

'I don't know,' Mortimer answered. 'And I'm sure I don't care. But I do know this—if you try to get out of it now on the plea of compulsion, why,

to prove you clearly wrong, and show you're in every way a free agent, I'm hanged if I don't brain you.'

As they went away from the shop where they had finally selected the most suitable typewriter, Arnold turned towards Cornhill.

'Well, what are you up to now?' Mortimer inquired suspiciously.

'I was thinking,' Arnold said with some little hesitation, 'whether I oughtn't in justice to Stanley and Lockhart to insure my life for a hundred pounds, in case I should die, don't you know, before I finished my novel.'

Next instant, several people in Cheapside were immensely surprised by the singular spectacle of a mild-faced gentleman in frock-coat and chimney-pot hat shaking his companion vigorously, as a terrier shakes a rat.

'Now, look here, you know, Willoughby,' the mild-faced gentleman remarked in a low but very decided voice; 'I've got the whip-hand of you, and I'm compelled to use it. You listen to what I say. If you spend one penny of that hundred pounds—which I regard as to all practical intents and purposes Miss Hesslegrave's, in any other way except to go to Venice and write this novel, which must be a really first-rate one—I'll tell you what I'll do: I'll publicly reveal the disgraceful fact that you're a British peer, and all the other equally disgraceful facts of your early life, your origin, and ancestry.'

The practical consequences of which awful threat was that by the next day but one Kathleen and Arnold were on their way South together, bound for their respective lodgings as of old in Venice.

CHAPTER XXIX.

ARNOLD'S MASTERPIECE.

In spite of hard fare and occasional short commons, that winter at Venice was a happy one for Arnold. For Kathleen, it was simply the seventh heavens. Every day of it was pure gold. For women are not like men in their loves. If a man's engaged, he pines and frets to get married; he sees a goal ever beckoning him forward; whereas if a woman's engaged, she is amply satisfied to sit down in peace with her lover by her side, to see him and to talk with him. That feminine joy Kathleen drank to the full through one delicious winter. What matter to her that perhaps at the end of it Arnold's projected book might prove a dismal failure?—in which case, of course, they would be plunged once more into almost as profound difficulties and doubts as ever. Meanwhile, she had Arnold. She lived in the present, as is the wont of women; and she enjoyed the present a great deal too much to be seriously alarmed for that phantom, the future.

Besides, she had such absolute confidence in Arnold! She knew he could write something ten thousand times better than the 'Elizabethan Seadog.' That, after all, was a mere tale of adventure, well suited to the grown-up childish taste of the passing moment. Arnold's novel, she felt certain, would be ever so much more noble and elevated in kind. Must not a man like Arnold, who had seen and passed through so many phases—who had known all the varied turns and twists of life, from the highest to the

lowest; who had lived and thought and felt and acted —be able to produce some work of art far finer and truer and more filling to the brain than Master John Collingham, the ignorant bully of an obscure village in Elizabethan Norfolk? To be sure, Arnold, more justly conscious of his own powers and his own failings, warned her not to place her ardent hopes too high; not to credit him with literary gifts he didn't possess; and, above all, not to suppose that knowledge, or power, or thought, or experience, would ever sell a book as well as novelty, adventure, and mere flashy qualities. In spite of all he could say, Kathleen persisted in believing in Arnold's story till she fairly frightened him. He couldn't bear to fix his mind on the rude awakening that no doubt awaited her.

For, after all, he hadn't the slightest reason to suppose he possessed literary ability. His momentary vogue was altogether due to his lucky translation of a work of adventure, whose one real merit lay in the go and verve of its Elizabethan narrator. He had been driven against his will into the sea of authorship, for navigating which he felt he had no talent, by Rufus Mortimer, in dire conspiracy with Stanley and Lockhart. Nothing but disastrous failure could possibly result from such an undertaking; he dreaded to wake up and find himself branded by the entire critical press of England as a rank impostor.

However, being by nature a born worker—a quality which he had inherited from Mad Axminster—once he had undertaken to supply Stanley and Lockhart with a novel unspecified, he worked at it with a will, determined to give them in return for their money the very best failure of which his soul was capable. With

this intent, he plied his typewriter, one-handed, morning, noon, and night; while Kathleen often dropped in at odd moments to write for him from dictation, and to assist him with her advice, her suggestions, and her criticism.

A good woman can admire anything the man of her choice may happen to do. To Kathleen, therefore, that first callow novel of Arnold Willoughby's—'A Romance of Great Grimsby'—was from its very inception one of the most beautiful, most divinely inspired, most noble works of art ever dreamt or produced by the human intellect. She thought it simply lovely. Nothing had yet been drawn more exquisite in its tender and touching delineation of the seafarer's wife than Maggie Holdsworth's character; nothing more stern or sombre or powerful than the figure of the gaunt and lean-limbed Skipper. It was tragedy to her—real high-class tragedy; when Arnold hinted gently how the *Hebdomadal Scarifier* would laugh his pathos to scorn, and how the *Antiquated Growler* would find it 'dull and uninteresting, not to say positively vulgar,' she thought it impossible to believe him. Nobody could read that grim story, she felt sure, without being touched by its earnestness, its reality, and its beauty.

All that winter through, Arnold and his occasional amanuensis worked hard at the novel that was the man's last bid for a bare subsistence. He felt it so himself; if that failed, he knew no hope was left him; he must give up all thoughts of Kathleen or of life; he must creep into his hole, like a wounded dog, to die there quietly. Not that Arnold was at all of a despondent nature; on the contrary, few men were so light and buoyant; but the difficulties he had en-

countered since he left off being an Earl made him naturally distrustful of what the future might have in store for him. Nevertheless, being one of the sort who never say die, he went on with his story with a valorous heart; for was it not for Kathleen? And if he failed, he thought to himself more than once, with just pride, he would have the consolation of knowing he had failed in spite of his best endeavour. The fault, then, would lie not with himself, but with nature. The best of us can never transcend his own faculties.

Rufus Mortimer spent that winter partly in Paris, partly in Rome. He avoided Venice. Though his palazzo on the Grand Canal lay empty all that year, he thought it best not to disturb Arnold's and Kathleen's felicity by interfering with their plans or obtruding his presence. But as spring came round, he paid a hasty visit of a few short days to the city that floats in the glassy Adriatic. It seemed like old times both to Arnold and Kathleen when Rufus Mortimer's gondola, equipped as ever by the two handsome Venetians in maize-coloured sashes, called at the doors of their lodgings to take them out together for their day's excursion. In the evening, Rufus Mortimer dropped round to Kathleen's rooms. Arnold was there by appointment; he read aloud a chapter or two for Mortimer's critical opinion. He chose the episode of the Skipper's marriage; the pathetic passage where Ralph Woodward makes his last appeal to Maggie Holdsworth; and the touching scene where Maggie at last goes forth, with her baby in her arms, in search of Enoch.

'Isn't it lovely!' Kathleen exclaimed with her innocent faith, as soon as Arnold had finished. 'I

tell Arnold he needn't be afraid of its reception. This is ten times as fine as the "Elizabethan Seadog."'

'I don't quite feel certain,' Mortimer answered, nursing his chin, and conscious of his responsibility; he feared to raise their hopes by too favourable an opinion. 'I don't seem to recognise it's just the sort of thing the public wants. Doesn't it lack dramatic interest? You and I may admire certain parts very much; and I confess there were passages that bro' t tears into my eyes; but the real question is, wi world at large like it—will it suit the great public at Smith's and Mudie's? We must remember that Willoughby's a quite new author; the very fact that the world expects from him something like the "Elizabethan Seadog" may tell against this simple domestic story. My experience is, that when once a man has stood on his head to amuse the public, the public will never allow him to stand on his feet again. And that's what I fear in this case; the people who read Master John Collingham greedily may vote Arnold Willoughby slow and uninteresting.'

'Oh, Mr. Mortimer, how can you?' Kathleen exclaimed, quite horrified.

'He's right, Kitty,' Arnold answered (it was Arnold and Kitty nowadays between them). 'I've felt that myself all along as I was writing it. The story's so sombre. It's better suited, I'm afraid, to the tastes of the generation that read "Adam Bede" than to the tastes of the generation that reads Rider Haggard and Conan Doyle and Rudyard Kipling. However, in patience must we possess our souls; there's no telling beforehand, in art or literature, how the British public may happen to look upon any new departure.' And he went to bed that night in distinctly low spirits.

A week later the manuscript was duly conveyed to London by Arnold in person. Kathleen followed a few days after, out of deference to Mrs. Grundy. Arnold was too shy or too proud to take the manuscript himself round to Stanley and Lockhart; but Mortimer bore it thither for him in fear and trembling. Scarcely had Mr. Stanley glanced at the book, when his countenance fell. He turned over a page or two. His mouth went down ominously.

'Well, this is *not* the sort of thing I should have expected from Mr. Willoughby,' he said with frankness. 'It's the exact antipodes, in style, in matter, in treatment, and in purpose, of the "Elizabethan Seadog." I doubt whether it's at all the sort of book to catch the public nowadays. Seems a decade or two behind the times. We've got past that type of novel. It's domestic, purely. We're all on adventure nowadays.'

'So I was afraid,' Mortimer answered; 'but, at any rate, I hope you'll do the best you can for it, now you've got it.'

'Oh, certainly,' Mr. Stanley answered, in no very reassuring voice. 'Of course, we'll do our level best for it. We've bought it and paid for it—in part, at least—and we're not likely, under those circumstances, not to do our level best for it.'

'Willoughby retains an interest in it, you remember,' Rufus Mortimer went on. 'You recollect, I suppose, that he retains a fifteen per cent. interest in it?'

'Oh, certainly,' Mr. Stanley answered. 'I recollect perfectly. Only, I'm afraid, to judge by the look of the manuscript—which is dull at first sight, undeniably dull—he hasn't much chance of getting more out

of it than the hundred pounds we've paid him in advance on account of royalties.'

This was disappointing news to Mortimer; for he knew Arnold had spent a fair part of that hundred on his living expenses in Venice; and where he was to turn in the future for support, let alone for the means to marry Kathleen, Mortimer could form no sort of conception. He could only go on hoping against hope that the book might 'pan out' better than Stanley and Lockhart supposed—that the public might see things in a different light from the two trade experts.

Three days later, Mr. Stanley came down to the office, much perturbed in spirit.

'I say, Lockhart,' he cried, 'I've been reading over this new thing of Willoughby's—this "Romance of Great Grimsby," as he chooses to call it—what an odious title!—and I must say I'm afraid we've just chucked away our money. He wrote the "Seadog" by a pure fluke, that's where it is. Must have been mad or drunk or in love when he did it. I believe he's really mad, and still sticks to it he discovered and transcribed that manuscript. He's written this thing now in order to prove to us how absolutely different his own natural style is. And he's proved it with a vengeance. It's as dull as ditch-water. I don't believe we shall ever sell out the first edition.'

'We can get it all subscribed beforehand, I think,' his partner answered, 'on the strength of the "Seadog." The libraries will want a thousand copies between them. And after all, it's only the same thing as if he had taken the hundred pounds we offered him in the first instance. We shall be no more out of

pocket, if this venture fails, than we should have been if he'd accepted our cheque last summer.'

'Well, we'd better pull off only as many as we think the demand will run to,' Mr. Stanley continued with caution. 'It'll be asked for at first, of course, on the merits of the "Seadog"; but as soon as people begin to find out for themselves what feeble trash it really is, they won't want any more of it! Poor pap, I call it!'

So the great novel, which had cost Arnold and Kathleen so many pangs of production, came out in the end in its regulation three volumes just like any other. There was an initial demand for it, of course, at Mudie's; that Arnold had counted upon; anything which bore the name of the 'editor' of 'An Elizabethan Seadog' on the title-page could hardly have fared otherwise. But he waited in profound anxiety for what the reviews would say of it. This was his own first book, for the 'Seadog' was but a transcript; and it would make or mar him as an original author.

Oddly enough, they had longer to wait for reviews than in the case of Arnold Willoughby's first venture. It was the height of the publishing season; editors' tables were groaning with books of travel, and biographies, and three-volume novels, and epochs of history, boiled down for the consumption of the laziest intellects. A week or two passed, and still no notice of the 'Romance of Great Grimsby.' At last, one afternoon, Arnold passed down the Strand, and stopped to buy an influential evening paper on the bare chance of a criticism. His heart gave a bound. Yes, there it was on the third page—'Mr. Arnold Willoughby's New Departure.'

He took it home with him, not daring to sit and read

it on the Embankment. The very first sentence chilled him.

'When a man begins by doing good work, the public has a right to expect good work in future from him. Mr. Arnold Willoughby, or whatever gentleman chooses to veil his unknown personality under that obvious pseudonym, struck fresh ground, and struck it well, in his stirring romance of "An Elizabethan Seadog." He would have done better to remember the advice which a Scotchman in the Gallery once gave to Boswell on a famous occasion: "Stick to the coo, mon!" Mr. Willoughby, unfortunately, has not stuck to his coo. He has a distinct talent of his own for wild tales of adventure, in which he can well simulate a certain air of truth, and can reproduce the style of a bygone age with extraordinary fidelity and historical accuracy. But the higher pathos and the higher constructive faculty are altogether beyond the range of his not inconsiderable powers. To put it frankly, his three-volume novel, in spite of obvious straining after the most exalted qualities, almost induces one to accept Mr. Willoughby's own improbable story of the finding of his manuscript in a Venetian cook-shop, and to believe that he was really nothing more, after all, than the translator and editor of that excellent tale of buccaneering life in the Sixteenth Century.'

Arnold's head reeled round. Still, he read on and on. It was all in the same strain. Not one word of cold praise for his poor little bantling! The reviewer demolished him as though he were not a vertebrate animal. His plot was crude, ill-considered, and ridiculous. His episodes were sometimes improbable, but oftener still impossible. His conversations were unreal; his personages shadowy; his picture of fisher-life melo-

dramatic and unconvincing. It was plain he knew nothing at first hand of the sea. Everything in the book from beginning to end was bad. Bad, bad, bad—as bad as it could be. The reviewer could only hope that in his next venture Mr. Willoughby would return from this puerile attempt to put himself outside his own natural limitations to the proper sphere he had temporarily deserted.

Arnold laid down the paper, crimson. Very new authors are affected by reviews. He knew it, he knew it! He had been betrayed into attempting a task beyond his powers by the kindly solicitations of that good fellow Mortimer. For Mortimer's sake, even more than his own, he felt it acutely. One thing he prayed—that Kathleen might not happen to see that review, and be made utterly miserable by it. He must try, if possible, to break his failure gently to her.

He went out again, to call on her, and hint his despondency. After that, he thought he would go and see Stanley and Lockhart, to ask them how much they were losing by his novel.

He walked along with burning cheeks. And as he passed Rufus Mortimer's club, that clever young Vernon, who writes such stinging reviews for the evening papers, turned, with a smile, to the American.

'There goes your friend Willoughby,' he said, with a wave of his cigarette. 'Have you seen what a dressing I've given that silly book of his in this evening's *Piccadilly*? "A Romance of Great Grimsby" indeed! "A Drivel of Idiocy" he ought to have called it.'

CHAPTER XXX.

WHAT ALWAYS HAPPENS.

When Arnold reached Kathleen's rooms, he found Mrs. Irving quietly seated there before him, while Kathleen herself was immensely excited about something unknown that had happened in the interval.

'Have you seen the evening papers?' she cried, almost as soon as he entered, rushing up and seizing his hand with sympathetic fervour. 'That dear Mrs. Irving, she's just brought them round to me!'

'What papers?' Arnold answered, trembling inwardly for her disappointment. Such friendliness was cruel. '*Not* to-night's *Piccadilly?*'

'Oh dear no,' Kathleen answered, unable any longer to restrain her delight. 'Who cares for the *Piccadilly?* The *Hyde Park Gazette* and to-morrow's *Athenæum*. Do look at them at once! There are such *lovely* reviews in them!'

'Reviews?' Arnold exclaimed, drawing a deep long breath. 'Oh, Kitty, of our book?' For it had been 'ours' with both of them in every-day talk from its very beginning.

'Yes, ours,' Kathleen answered, everjoyed. 'And, oh, Arnold, I'm so proud. To think it's your *very*, very own this time! I shall always be so glad to remember I helped you write it!'

'Let me see them,' Arnold cried, half mazed; and Kathleen, with a glowing face, handed him over the papers.

The poor fellow began, still tremulous, with the *Hyde Park Gazette*. How his heart beat fast, and

then stood still within him! The heading alone was enough: 'Mr. Willoughby's New Triumph.'

Once more the ground reeled under him, though in the opposite sense from the way it had reeled an hour or so before. He clutched a chair for support and sank into it, all dazzled, This was too, too splendid! 'Mr. Willoughby,' the notice began, with journalistic stiffness, 'has scored a second success, far greater in its way than the success he scored over "An Elizabethan Seadog." His new novel, though utterly unlike its popular predecessor, is as admirable in execution; but it is infinitely superior in design and purpose. The change is fundamental. Mr. Willoughby's new book strikes a far higher note, and strikes it firmly, clearly, definitely, with a hand of perfect mastery. His maiden effort had the merit of an exciting romance of action and adventure; it belonged to the type now so unduly popular with the vast body of readers; and our author showed us there that he could hold his own against any man living in the department of lurid historical fiction. He has done wisely now in revealing those profounder qualities of thought and of artistic workmanship which can only be adequately displayed in a more serious piece of psychological analysis. The result is most satisfactory. We must congratulate Mr. Willoughby on having escaped from thraldom to the foolish fancy of a passing day, on having abjured the fearful joys of gore that flows like water, and on having ventured to use his own great powers to the best and highest purpose in the production of a sterling and pathetic romance, far worthier of his gifts than his in many ways admirable "Elizabethan Seadog."'

Arnold read on and on in a fervour of reaction,

This was glorious! magnificent! Line by line the review revived in him all his belief in himself, all his belief in the reality of his own creations. And it flattered him profoundly. For it saw in his work those very qualities he himself had striven hardest with all his might to put into it. That is the only kind of praise a sensible man ever cares for; he wants to be given credit for the merits he possesses, not for the merits he lacks: he wants to be approved of for producing the effects he actually aimed at. Arnold's face glowed with pleasure by the time he had reached the end; and as soon as he had finished that first flattering notice, Kathleen, smiling still more deeply, handed him the *Athenæum*.

Arnold turned to the critical organ again with a vague sense of terror. The first few sentences completely reassured him. The leading literary journal was more judicial, to be sure, and more sparing of its approbation, than the penny paper, as becomes a gazette which retails itself to this day for an aristocratic threepence; but the review, as he read on, gave Arnold no less pleasure and gratification than the other one. For he perceived in it before long a certain tone and style which form as it were the hall-mark of a very distinguished critic, to have gained whose suffrages was indeed no small joy to him. For the first time in his life Arnold felt he was being appreciated for himself alone—for the work he had really and actually performed, not for his artificial position or for extraneous merit falsely attributed to him.

As for Kathleen, glowing pink with delight, she stood glancing over his shoulder as he read, and watching with a thrill the evident pleasure in his face at each fresh word of approval. Her cup was very

full. At last he was appreciated! As soon as he had finished, she turned, with a face all crimson, to her silver-haired friend.

'I *must*, Mrs. Irving!' she cried, with a womanly gesture—'I really must!' And in a transport of joy and triumph, she flung her arms round him and kissed him fervently.

'I think,' Mrs. Irving said, rising with a quiet smile, and setting the bonnet straight over those silver locks, 'I'd better be going to look after some errands.—No, dear; I can't possibly stop any longer; and I dare say you and Mr. Willoughby will have lots of things now to talk over quietly with one another.'

And so they did. Arnold felt, of course, that if one bad review didn't make a chilling frost, neither did two good ones make an established reputation. Still, it did seem to him now as though the sky were clearing a bit; as though it might be possible for him at last to marry Kathleen some time in the measurable future. They must wait and see, to be sure, how the book went off; but if it really succeeded, as a commercial venture, Arnold thought his path in life would henceforth lie tolerably smooth before him.

So he waited a week or two, not daring meanwhile to go near Stanley and Lockhart's, for fear of a disappointment. During the interval, however, Kathleen couldn't help seeing for herself at the bookstalls and libraries abundant evidence that the 'Romance of Great Grimsby' was making its way rapidly in public favour. Wherever she went, people spoke to her of 'Your friend Mr. Willoughby's book—oh, charming, quite charming! What a delightful man he must be to know—so clever; and *so* versatile!' I wish you could bring him here.' And when Kathleen answered

briefly, with a deep red spot on her burning cheek, that he didn't care to go out, people murmured to themselves, half aside: 'Ah, a little affectation! He'll get over *that*, of course, as soon as he ceases to be the lion of the moment. But it's always so with lions. They're invariably affected.' For it was Arnold's fate in life to be persistently credited with the virtues and vices alike that were most alien to his shy and retiring disposition.

At the end of three weeks more, with a very nervous step, he went round by himself to Stanley and Lockhart's. The moment he got inside the publisher's door, however, he was no longer in doubt whether or not his book was really selling. The office-boy recognised him at once, and descended deferentially from his high bare stool, flinging the wooden barrier open wide with a respectful sweep for the man who had written the book of the season. Arnold went up in a maze to the senior partner's room. Mr. Stanley, humming and bowing, received the new lion with much rubbing of hands and a very glowing countenance.

'Selling, my dear sir?' he said in answer to Arnold's modest inquiry. 'Why, it's selling like wildfire. Biggest success of its kind since "Robert Elsmere." I confess I certainly had my doubts at first; I had my doubts: I won't deny it. I thought, having once fixed your public with the first book you—edited'—Mr. Stanley, catching his breath, just saved himself with an effort from the peccant verb—'you would do better to stick, in future, to the same kind of thing you'd made your original hit with. It was an experiment—an experiment. But you judged your own real talent more justly than I did. There can be no sort

of doubt now that your book has hit the mark. It's being read all round. We're going to press to-day with a third edition.'

Arnold's face grew pale.

'A third edition!' he murmured. This sudden success at last was almost too much for him. 'Well, I'm glad of it,' he answered again, after a moment's pause—'very glad indeed; for I've found life hard at times, and once or twice lately, since my hand got crushed, to tell you the plain truth, I've almost despaired of it.'

'Well, you won't find it hard in future, the publisher said kindly, with a benignant smile. 'No despairing henceforward. Whatever you write after this will command its own market. We're pleased to think, Mr. Willoughby, we were the first to encourage you. It's a feather in our cap, as I said to Lockhart. Would you like a small cheque on account, say for a couple of hundreds?'

'A couple of hundred pounds?' Arnold cried, taken aback. To have earned such a sum for himself as two hundred pounds seemed to him well-nigh incredible.

'Why, yes,' the man of business answered, with a good-humoured laugh. 'A great deal more than that must be due to you already. Let me see: three thousand at eighteen-and-six—h'm, h'm: exactly so. Judging by what we made on the last book we published (the sale of which, after the same length of time had elapsed, was barely two-thirds of yours), I should fancy, before you've done, your book ought to bring you in somewhere about two thousand five hundred.'

Arnold gasped for breath. Two thousand five

hundred pounds! And all of his own making! With that one maimed hand too! For the first time in his life, he was positively proud of himself.

'There's only one thing, Kitty,' he said an hour or two later, as he sat holding her hand in her own pretty room in Kensington—'only one thing that mars my complete happiness; and that is the fact that I don't feel quite sure whether such work as mine is of any use to humanity. I don't feel quite sure whether a man can hold himself justified to the rest of his kind in living on the produce of labour like that, as he might if he were a sailor, now, or a shoemaker, or a miner!'

'I do,' Kathleen answered, with a woman's simpler faith. 'I feel quite certain of it. What would life be worth, after all, without these higher tastes and these higher products—art, literature, poetry? It is they, and they alone, that give it its value. I thought to myself, as you were writing it and dictating it to me at Venice: "How wrong it would be for this man, who can think things like those, and put his thoughts so beautifully, to throw away his gifts by doing common sailor's work, that any ordinary workman with half his brains and a quarter of his sensitiveness could do a hundred times better, most probably, than he could!'

'Not better,' Arnold exclaimed, correcting her hastily, and put on his mettle at once by this stray suggestion of inferiority in his chosen craft. 'I'm a tip-top mariner! I don't know whether I can paint; and I don't know whether I can write a novel worth the paper it's printed on: but I *do* know I was always a first-rate hand at reefing a sail in dirty weather; and the bo'sun used to say, "Send Willoughby aloft,

cap'n; he's the surest of the lot of 'em." Till my hand got crushed, I could haul a sheet with the best man in England. My one consolation now is, that I lost it in the performance of my duty to the world; and that so, having served my time, as it were, till accident maimed me, I'm at liberty to live on, like a sort of literary Chelsea pensioner, on whatever light work I can best turn the relics of my shattered hand to.'

'And I'm sure it's *good* work, too,' Kathleen persisted, unabashed, with a woman's persistency. 'Work that does good in the world quite as much as seal-oil, or shoes, or coal, not only by giving pleasure to whoever reads it, but also by making people understand one another's difficulties and troubles better—breaking down barriers of class or rank, and so unconsciously leading us all to be more sympathetic and human to one another.'

'Perhaps so,' Arnold answered. 'I hope it is so, Kitty!'

There was a long pause next, during which Kathleen stared hard at the empty fireplace. Then Arnold spoke again.

'After what Stanley and Lockhart told me,' he said, soothing her hand with his own—'can you see any just cause or impediment, darling, why we two shouldn't make it Wednesday fortnight?'

Kathleen leaned forward to him with happy tears in her brimming eyes.

'None at all, dear Arnold,' she answered, too happy for words, almost. 'The sooner now, I think, the better.'

They sat there long, hand in hand, saying all they said mutely—which is, after all, the best way to say

many things that lie deepest in the heart of humanity. Then Kathleen spoke again.

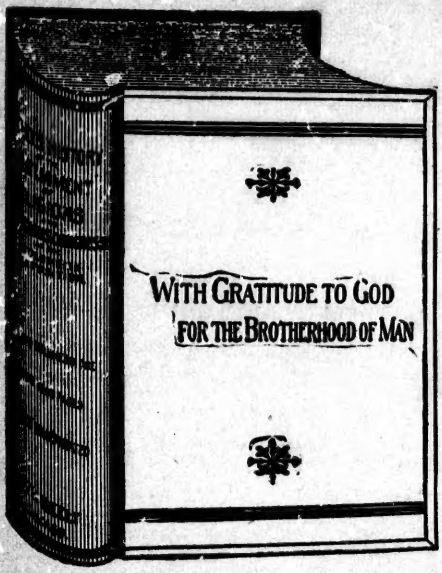
'Only for one thing, dearest Arnold, do I wish you could have married me under your own real name.—No; don't start and misunderstand me. I don't want to be a Countess; I have no mean ambitions: I'd rather be Arnold Willoughby's wife, who wrote that beautiful book, than ten thousand times over an English Countess. But I do wish the world could only have known how brave and how strong you are, and how much you have gone through for the sake of principle. I want it to know how you might at any time have put out your hand and reclaimed your true rank, and how, for conscience' sake, you refused to do it. Many a time at Venice, this last long winter, when I saw you so poor and ill and troubled, I thought to myself: "Oh, I wish he could only break through his resolve, and go back with a rush to his own great world again." And then I thought, once more: "Oh no; for if he could do that, he wouldn't be the Arnold I love, and admire, and believe in so firmly: he *is* himself just in virtue of that; and it's for being himself that I love him so utterly." And—it's irrational, of course; illogical; absurd; self-contradictory; but I somehow do wish you could proclaim yourself to the world, so that the world might admire you as it ought and would—for never so proclaiming yourself!'

Arnold stooped down and kissed her.

'My darling,' he answered, smoothing her cheek, 'if I have gained your love, that's more than enough for me. What we are, not what we are taken for, is the thing that really matters. Most men, I suppose, are never truly known—not to the very heart and core

of them—except by the one woman on earth that loves them. I often wonder whether I did right in the first place; whether I ought ever to have shifted all that responsibility and all that wealth to dispose of, on to the shoulders of my cousin Algernon, who is certainly not the wisest or best man to make use of them. But would I have used them better? And once having done it, my way then was clear. There was no going back again. I shall be happy now in the feeling that, left entirely to myself, and by my own work alone, I have so far justified my existence to mankind that my countrymen are willing to keep me alive in comfort, for the sake of the things I can do and make for them. As the world goes, that's the one test we can have of our usefulness. And, Kitty, if I hadn't done as I have done, I should never have met *you;* and then I should never have known the one woman on earth who is willing to take me, not for the guinea stamp, but for the metal beneath it—who knows and believes that the man's the gold for a' that!'

THE END.



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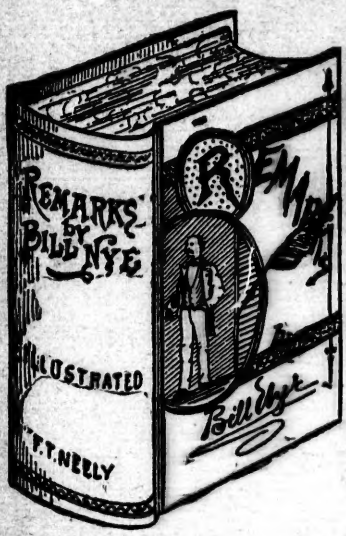
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